



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

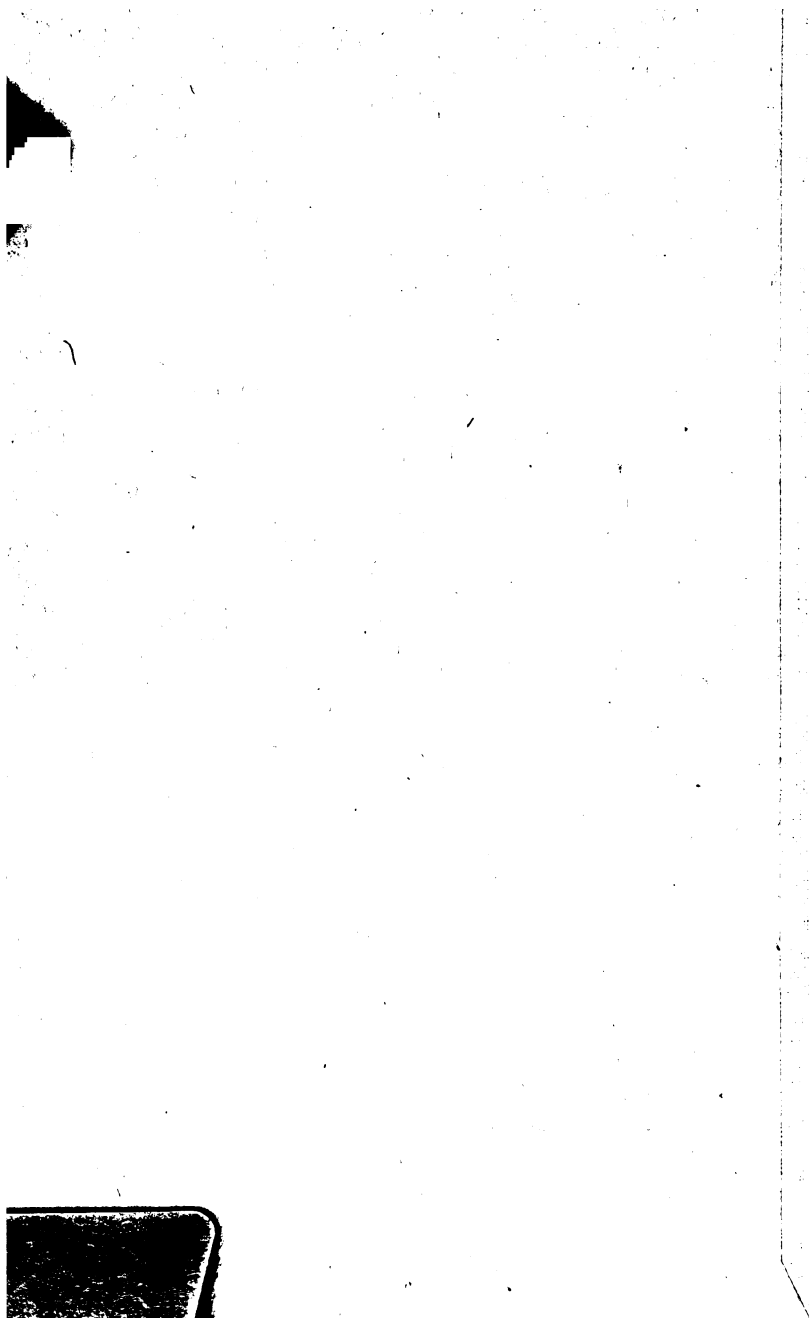


NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES



3 3433 07487623 0







Macilwaine  
NCW















# THE TOWER MAIDEN

MacIlvaine

HC 1



*Other Books by the same Author*

THE TWILIGHT REEF.

DINKINBAR.

FATE THE FIDDLER.

THE WHITE STONE.

THE UNDERSONG.

ANTHONY BRITTEN.



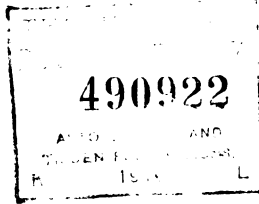
THE  
TOWER MAIDEN

BY  
HERBERT C. MACILWAINE

LONDON  
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL & CO., LTD.

1907  
NEW YORK  
PUBLIC  
LIBRARY





**DEDICATION**

***TO ALL THOSE WHO WERE THE  
FRIENDS OF THIS LITTLE STORY  
IN THE DAYS OF ITS ADVERSITY***

**Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co.  
At the Ballantyne Press, Edinburgh**





# THE TOWER MAIDEN

## I

LIFE in the old German town was going forward with the unhasting step that is the prescriptive pace of humanity when it has leave to pursue unhindered the small, vital business of gathering in its daily food. In early morning, the clean, gray, cobbled floor of the great market-place had been invaded by an orderly, loquacious army of fruit-sellers; now, in the late forenoon, the drenching sunlight fell upon streets of tilted awnings; beneath the awnings, in a mellow shade, lay piled the harvest of a hundred orchards in the green country beyond the city walls.

Up and down the cobbled alley-ways between the fruit-stalls the stream of buyers eddied slowly. At the stalls presided gray-haired women with still, brown, weather-worn faces;



## The Tower Maiden

when no customers offered they sat idly by their fruit, as though the day's work were done, and they had come here for rest and gossip, not for trade. From the whole market square there rose a steady hum of voices and of slow-treading feet. Commerce here went forward leisurely, free of the goad and spur of competition; among these simple merchants, laws of supply were left unfettered by any conspiracy to the end that they might grow rich in haste; the providence of nature was left to arbitrate upon prices current; the transference of fruit from stall to marketing-basket had an incidental air—seemed a mere chance exchange of courtesy between odd members of a parliament of housewives.

From three sides of the square, old many-windowed houses looked down upon the tented stalls and the simmering crowd, even as they had looked in the elder days, when plague and famine had racked the town, or when war had heaped these same worn cobbles with its harvest of dead men. Scrupulous painting and repairs could neither make new nor modernise these ancients: the weariness of age had sapped their stalwartness and dragged them from the perpendicular; their wooden frames, where



## The Tower Maiden

they stood exposed, were riven and channelled in the grain, like the cheeks of old Time himself. They stood up, like veteran burghers in council, each one its neighbour's prop; and each looked so frail in its solidity, so utterly dependent on its company, that it seemed as though one had but to pluck from any house a single stone or beam, to bring the whole rank tumbling into ruin. In the fierce sunshine, the steep red roofs trembled, as if the veterans' heads were quaking in a palsy of old age.

Across the fourth side of the square stood a church that seemed, like the houses at its foot, heedless of dull today and of the slow traffic of the market-place, and busy with old memories; starkly plain, yet overloaded here and there with a profusion of barbaric ornament, without repose or symmetry, it drove the mind rather to thoughts of wars and tumults than of piety: it stood above the town more like an aged warrior dozing in his armour than a ministering priest. The high tower that reared its naked shaft at one end was crowned with a metal cupola, green, curved, and dinted, like a bronze helmet that had rung in many an ancient battlefield.

Beneath the weathered cupola, the tower-



## The Tower Maiden

head was pierced with narrow windows; and far below in the sunny market-place a stranger, who had paused in his strolling to gaze above him as he slowly ate crimson cherries from a paper bag, watched with the eye of fancy for the glint of steel behind the tower windows—for the sight of a bearded soldier of long ago, in plated jerkin and steel cap, leaning upon his halberd, gazing out above the red-roofed town across the wide green champaign, on the watch for enemies.

A great cloud, like a sunny Alp drifted from its moorings, slid across the sun, and church and square were sunk in shadow. To the idle watcher in the square, it seemed that, as the shadow fell, a gray something stirred behind a window in the tower, and vanished. There was grayness, then, where he had looked for glitter—an unresisting spirit, where he had sought a mailed and stubborn warrior as the presiding genius of this place. In a spasm of that intense preoccupation with immaterial things, which is wont to break in upon true indolence, he kept his eyes upon the window until the returning sunlight smote upon the tower and lighted up its seeming vacancy. Then delectable idleness reasserted itself: re-



## The Tower Maiden

membering his fruit, the idler pored above his paper bag, tossed the remaining cherries in it, and became absorbed like an urchin in choosing out the smallest, leaving the richest to the last.

He had mooned away the sunny morning, had drifted, now for the last hour, with the lazy currents of the market square. His trim clothing and straw hat proclaimed him, even to a dull eye or fleeting look, as English of the English; and yet, although in shape and habiliments he looked as alien to the mild, home-keeping folk about him as a kingfisher among domestic poultry, he had drawn upon himself none of the resentment of his foreignness that is wont to mark the passage of the inquisitive tourist, with his aggressive pity for ways and folk that are not his own. This one seemed, for all his outward dissimilarity, curiously at home in the sunny slowness of the place: like a native returned from exile amidst uncongenial things who, tomorrow maybe, would slough his trim uncomfortable clothing and appear in blue blouse and roomy homespun. As he stood now, restored to blissful vacancy, a child's voice sounded near him.



## The Tower Maiden

"The stones burn my feet, little grandmother, when I stand so, quite still."

"A moment, my heart," the answer came; "one tiny moment, and thou shalt have comfort. In the church yonder, seest thou, it is cool, and there is peace."

The mild protest had come from a tiny, bare-legged, shock-headed boy, who was standing close behind the Englishman. The child was tightly holding with one fist to the skirt of an aged woman, who was making simple purchases at a fruit-stall. As she heard the child's complaint she turned to answer him and to pat his chubby brown cheek. The cheek glowed with young health; the hand was gnarled and withered-looking; to the Englishman, who had turned to watch and listen, sorrow unspeakable was written in every line of the aged figure, and utter patience sounded in the voice. The face was hidden from him by a wide cap of snowy white, and into the hollow of this the child nodded solemnly upward, lifting slowly each in its turn his bare feet, as he heard the promise of comfort; the Englishman found himself nodding in unison with the chubby head. As the old woman turned again to the stall, the



## The Tower Maiden

stranger leaned above the boy and whispered in his faulty German :

“Dost thou like cherries, little one ?”

The child gripped tighter on the skirt and sidled closer to it, looking up with big eyes at the strangely clad, strangely spoken creature. The Englishman set himself to overcome this wise timidity; he peeped carefully into the bag, pretended a wonderful delight at what he saw there, and held it down to the boy, advising him with raised eyebrows and solemn nods to feast his eyes also.

The child, reassured, looked slowly into the bag, then upward at the stranger, and returned the nods in kind ; as the bag was thrust a little closer to him he stretched out a brown fist and gathered in the offering, tucking and pressing it firmly against his body.

The Englishman stooped and held his ear close to the face of the child.

“I thank you finely,” said the little boy ;  
“God greet thee.”

“God greet thee, little one.”

The international episode had passed unnoticed by the grandmother, who had remained absorbed in her marketing; but as the Englishman stood up he found himself the object of a



## The Tower Maiden

slow, benevolent contemplation on the part of several townsfolk who had suspended their trade or gossiping to watch him. The spectators one and all smiled broadly upon the foreigner, and nodded to him as he met their eyes in turn. The Englishman eagerly returned the approving nods and flashed back a smile that was part triumphant, part shame-faced. He flushed as he smiled, and passed quickly from amongst his audience: it seemed as though the kingfisher in the poultry-yard had become suddenly aware of his strange plumage and his isolation, and were making in a panic for his native sedges. The suspended current, as the stranger left, moved on again at its slumbrous pace.

The Englishman walked quickly until he stood alone, with the tented stalls behind him: in front, beyond an empty stretch of clean cobbled floor, stood the church, casting its narrow ribbon of noonday shade. Through the half-opened door he caught a glimpse of the cool, gray, cavernous interior.

"In the church there is peace," he muttered, and added, in bitter irony, "Peace!"

Impatience was followed by a weary discontent, as his eyes roamed about the church



## The Tower Maiden

and settled at last upon the clock-face that was let into the tower at the level of the roof. A little while ago, the very look of the weathered dial had been to him as an eye looking with the approval of wisdom gathered through the ages upon his time-forgetting indolence; the single blunt hand, that took no heed of minutes, but pointed only the slow circuit of the hours—even these were written dimly, in old figures of faded gilt—had soothed the idler like the visible presence of some dear friend as idle as himself. But now—now that the blunt hour-hand had crept close upon the time of a dreaded assignation that must set a period to his solitary, vacant strolling—the very sunshine had become a weariness to him.

He cast one look to right and left, then plodded to the church steps, and faced the market-place with an air of dull endurance.

Coming towards him across the vacant stretch of stones were the old woman and the little boy. The face of the Englishman softened again as he beheld them. "In the church there is peace," he said in a whisper as he watched the trotting urchin, still with the cherries held close to him, still with a



## The Tower Maiden

brown fist clinging to the coarse skirt of the aged grandmother: the face of the bowed woman was still hidden in the white cap; the figure seemed more than ever the living image of weariness and of patient sorrow.

Then, a moment later, the Englishman repeated the last word of his phrase; and again he laid upon the iterated word a wrathful emphasis. Past the old woman and the little boy there had come with swinging strides a lusty cleric, in flowing black cassock: he passed unseen by the old woman, but the little boy looked up, awed, and saluted timidly with the hand that held the bag of cherries. The burly priest made no acknowledgment of the child's obeisance, but strode on towards the church door, preoccupied and arrogant. The Englishman stood aside, scowling, to admit the priest: it was when he turned his eyes again towards the market-place that the word "Peace!" burst from him, loaded for the second time with bitterness. Along the central alley-way between the fruit-stalls, a lady was coming with rapid inelastic steps towards the church. A broad sun-hat, held in place by ribbons tied beneath the chin, shaded her uncompromisingly alert and ener-



## The Tower Maiden

getic face ; a light camp-stool was hung upon her left arm, and her right hand—that kept time to her steps with a military swing—held a compact volume bound in scarlet.

As she strode out upon the vacant cobbles that lay before the church, the old woman and the child passed slowly by the Englishman and through the open doorway ; the pure white cap was still turned towards the ground ; but the little boy, half in salute, half in triumph, held up his cherries and smiled upon the Englishman, whose black look melted again in kindness as he returned the childish greeting.

It was, however, a dull face that he turned to the lady, who now was hailing him as she came with her firm tread up the steps, and strode past him into the church.

“ Well, Clement, so you are punctual ; that’s right, for we have a busy time before us.”

Immediately upon entering the church, the lady had opened her guide-book at a page already marked by a strip of paper. The strip contained a close-set list of items, written with scrupulous neatness. She paused, before disposing the slip elsewhere in the book, to cast a busy and approving eye upon her list,



## The Tower Maiden

the six topmost items of which were already ticked off by pencil marks. From this occupation she looked up to see the young man holding his straw hat behind him in both hands, and balancing himself in absent dejection on toes and heels alternately.

The lady eyed him for a moment in silence, and with a displeasure which was none the less evident in that it was not suffered to disturb her strong, well-bred complacency. The young man continued his gloomy exercise.

"Clement," said the lady at last, "take my camp-stool, please, and call the verger."

The young man departed, on heavy feet, carrying hat and camp-stool as though they had been leaden weights. As he reached the nave, he beheld coming towards him a square-built man who carried a bunch of ancient-looking keys, strung together on a rusty wire. From afar off he signalled to the visitor a genial apology for his slowness, and pointed downward.

The Englishman, once more light-footed, all but ran along the aisle to meet the verger, whose movements were impeded by a wooden leg. On the stump had been bound a knob of felt, to render it noiseless; to the impres-



## The Tower Maiden

sionable foreigner there was something quaint, yet infinitely pathetic in the flapping trouser-leg, the bare wooden shank and its muffled end.

"Yes, yes," the maimed verger explained in robust but decorous undertones, "the gentle-folk would behold the church? Surely. The gracious gentleman perceives that I come, even so quickly as possible. So, the spirit is willing, see you, but"—he pointed downward again, and looked up, beaming, at the Englishman—"but the leg of wood is not swift. Hey?"

To a closer look, he had the air of one upon whom the burden of old age had descended in middle life, not with the slow flight of years, but by the sudden visitation of calamity.

"We have time; do not hurry."

"The gentry are kind. So, the gentleman understands, and speaks, even, in the German: thus it is agreeable."

The lady, politely impatient, stood with a finger laid upon her open guide-book. The verger would have included her also in the league of friendliness established between himself and the young Englishman; but she cut short his genial advances, and requested to be shown a certain painting of St. Anthony of



## The Tower Maiden

Padua that, as the book informed her, hung in this church.

The verger made a meek obeisance. "If the gentlefolk will graciously come with me," he said, and limped obediently away.

The picture, hidden by a screen, was in a little side-altar of the church. Beneath the picture, a little to one side, but in the same alcove, there hung a tall wooden crucifix, and at a prie-Dieu beneath it, there knelt the aged woman. Beside her on the stones lay her marketing bag; beside the bag was another one, of paper, stained here and there with blots of dull crimson, where the mould and colour of the cherries in it were showing through.

At the side of the bowed figure stood the little boy, deep in a childish reverie; he pressed his chin firmly on his breast, then slowly raised his head, upward and backward, until he looked with half-closed eyes at the roof; then the shaggy head would sink, the chin would be readjusted on the chest, and the slow lifting of the head begin again.

The little fellow's two brown hands were folded in the attitude of prayer upon the bench before him; but the Englishman—with



## The Tower Maiden

a backward eye upon his own childhood—knew by the swaying head, the rapt face and parted lips of his small friend of the market-place, that the childish brain was busy with the unfathomable mystery of common things, and steeped in wonder that, when one half-closed the eyes and swung the head, so, the great church, doubtless the town also, and all its houses, and the fields beyond, swirled about one thus, like paper in the wind.

But the verger was explaining in respectful undertones that if the gentlefolk desired to behold the hidden picture, a small payment was first necessary—so the regulations decreed, as the gracious lady was no doubt aware. The lady was not aware, and was busily skimming the lines of her guide-book, seeking to ascertain whether this exaction were a just one, when the old woman raised and threw back her head and flung out both arms in a very agony of supplication; then she reached up to touch with her two withered hands the wounded feet of the Christ, kissed the hands, and bowed her face in them again.

The lady, satisfied that the charge was just, bade the verger in her firm voice to uncover the picture. She had opened, in her alert and



## The Tower Maiden

yet unhurried manner, a steel-bound satchel at her waist, and was feeling in it for her purse, when the young man laid a determined finger on her wrist.

"Do you not see the woman at her prayers?" he whispered in her ear.

The Englishwoman turned upon the kneeling figure the eyes of a zealous and indefatigable sightseer. "Decidedly," she said critically, turning her head this way and that: "Yes, a quaint figure." She drew back her head for a long, final look, and nodded several times. "Yes, I shall keep that. It is a type. I'm glad you drew my attention to it, Clement."

The lady drew her purse from her satchel, the screen was noisily withdrawn, and the masterpiece revealed. Then she read aloud from the book in her steady voice, business-like, brief notes upon the picture and its subject. It was St Anthony with the Christ-child in his arms—St. Anthony the pitying, the simple, the friend of little children and of all defenceless things. The lady paused after each sentence with her finger on the page, to bestow a severely concentrated look upon the picture, so as to impress its points one by one clearly on her memory.



## The Tower Maiden

When the inventory was completed, the lady said, after a last, compendious look, "Have you got that, Clement? Shall we go on?" Receiving no answer, she turned.

The Englishman was not there.

Two hard, upright lines stood upon the smooth forehead of the lady as she turned accusing eyes upon the verger.

He spread out deprecating hands. "It is possible that the good gentleman has left the church. I——"

"You have seen this—and have not spoken?"

"Truly, no—I—I have not seen it, gracious lady. But the heat, Madame—the sun. It is fearful—truly I think a storm is brewing. Possibly — quite possibly — a headache has afflicted the gentleman."

The lady had been running an angry finger up and down the parting of her book. In a moment, however, the tokens of displeasure were submerged in her customary strong complacency. She bent once more a busy eye upon the pages. "It is of no consequence," she said; and again there was in her politeness a rebuke of familiarity. "We will go to the altar, if you please."

The Englishman, however, was close at



## The Tower Maiden

hand. Hidden behind a massive column, he was crouching in a seat, drumming on his teeth with the knuckles of a clenched fist, staring towards the altar, and muttering :

“‘I shall keep that!’ The living likeness of sorrow as deep as life—I shall keep that; I shall add that to my collection. I am a cultivated, observant, highly sympathetic woman. I shall keep that—the sentient, defenceless prey of death and horror—admirable stuff for conversation. ‘Quaint’; a knick-knack for the drawing-room—very rare.”

He stopped his muttering, but drummed more fiercely on his teeth. The huge stone-gray perspective of the nave ended in a veritable riot of decoration about the altar; its spiral shafts and labyrinthine excess of ornament, all a blaze of gold, jarred upon the ordered dignity of the nave like an insult to venerable old age. The burly, black-robed priest was busy about the altar with his preparations for some forthcoming ceremonial. The Englishman, remembering that ignoring of the childish salute, fixed a malignant eye upon the bowing priest, and raged at all the hollow ritual and lip-service of the world.

He sat there until the collected lady with



## The Tower Maiden

her guide-book, and with the amiable, limping verger at her heels, rounded into the nave and began her resolute inspection of the gilded altarpiece. The Englishman rose at once and slid cautiously round the column, bringing himself again into the aisle, over against the side-altar and the veiled picture of St. Anthony of Padua.

The old woman was newly risen from her prayers, and was moving at her slow step, along the aisle and towards the church door; the boy, again with his cherries pressed close to him, was lagging dreamily behind her. As the Englishman stole round the column, he and the child came face to face. The little boy stopped, bringing his bare feet together, and saluted as before. He smiled upon the stranger in sublime confidence, and nodded as if in wise comprehension of his mysterious movements round the column.

The Englishman read in this infantile approval and sympathy an absolute vindication of his rebellious wrath. He went to the child as to a deliverer, and stooped above him, totally at peace with himself and the world, as he had been in the sunny market-place.

“So, little man, in the church it is cool, and there is comfort—is it not so?”



## The Tower Maiden

The child nodded solemnly upward.

The Englishman patted his shoulder, and said, with an eye upon the aged, retreating figure, "The little grandmother has much sorrow—is it not true?"

"Oh, much. My mother has newly died."

"Ah, thy mother. Daughter of the little grandmother there?"

"Yes. My father has also died, it is so long ago that I do not remember. I have no brothers and no sisters. We are alone, the little grandmother and I."

"Alone. Ye are also poor—is it not?"

"Oh yes. We are poor. But the neighbours are kind."

"Give me thy hand, little one. So." The Englishman laid two gold pieces in the outstretched palm, and closed the brown fingers tightly over them. "Give these to the little grandmother, they are——" He stooped nearer yet to the face of the little boy, ransacking his slender vocabulary for some simple message of good will, and found none. "See, already she leaves the church. Good-bye, thou brave little man."

The child stood on tiptoe and put his lips to the Englishman's cheek. "God greet



## The Tower Maiden

thee," he said, and hurried off down the now empty aisle.

At the doorway he turned and stood an instant in the full light to salute again, this time with the clenched fist.

The Englishman stood long with his eyes upon the shaft of light that shone in at the open door, where the child had disappeared. At last, "In the church there is peace," he said, no longer bitterly, and—touching his cheek where the little boy had kissed him—"I shall keep that."

He stole a look at intervals from behind his pillar, no longer now in skulking animosity, but in serene and pitying absorption, until the methodical lady had finished her circuit of the church. He saw her seat herself, fee and dismiss the verger, take out her pencil from the steel-bound satchel and firmly tick off another item on her list. Then she moved her pencil-point steadily down the pages of her book, pausing now and then, and looking up to fix her resolute eye upon some frieze or capital, or battered monument.

The young man watched the determined pencil, and the energetic movements of the sun-hat with a bemused, impersonal tolerance.



## The Tower Maiden

"The collection thrives, this morning," he said quietly, and marvelled peacefully that the words came now quite without taint of malice.

Freed suddenly from the nagging itch of trifles, he stood by his pillar, with the curved knuckles—that so lately had beaten out the measure of his anger—held to the place where the soft mouth of the child had touched his cheek: time-forgetting, as in the market square, he was borne mysteriously aloft into that luminous upper air of contemplation where eager minds rest sometimes on their way to dream.

A touch upon his shoulder startled him. The amiable verger was there with a twinkle of mischief showing in his benevolent smile. The Englishman, with an eye upon the massive keys, beheld himself a fugitive from the laws of circumstance: he had tasted freedom, had sunned himself beneath the open sky; and now he saw recapture imminent. Here was the gaoler with his keys. As he had looked, before leaving the market-place, for some avenue of escape, so he looked now. His eyes made a survey of the church, and returned baffled to the face of the verger. If this were indeed the keeper of a dungeon, surely it was



## The Tower Maiden

a kindly one: the verger's eyes still twinkled as though hinting at some obvious refuge, which he however, as trusted keeper of the dungeon, dared not in honour overtly suggest. The Englishman looked again with quickened ingenuity, and his eyes fell upon an ancient doorway in the wall at the end of the aisle, hard by the entrance to the church. That door must give upon the stairway to the tower; and in one flash of recollection and resolve a road to freedom lay mapped before him.

He pointed to the verger's keys, and beyond him to the door. "One is permitted to ascend the tower?"

The twinkling benevolence died suddenly out of the verger's face: the dungeon-keeper, it would seem, had repented of his unlawful generosity. "It is permitted, yes." He fingered unwillingly at his keys. "But the lady? Already she is disturbed by the kind gentleman's absence."

"She"—the Englishman looked across the width of the church, and saw that the lady was making preparations to depart—"is content to be alone. I also."

The verger once more limped obediently away, sorting his keys as he went. The closed



## The Tower Maiden

door was sunk deep in the wall ; it was seamed and black in its timbers, studded with square rivet-heads and clamped with enormous iron hinges wrought upon the anvil of some forgotten craftsman, centuries ago. The lock groaned like a thing complaining in its sleep as the bolt slid back.

The verger stood in the half-opened doorway, and turned shrewdly suspicious eyes upon the stranger, who could hear now, along the further aisle, the alert and springless footsteps of the lady.

The verger's look of shrewd suspicion vanished : he stepped out. "Enter then," he said, "I have no longer fear."

The Englishman ran in. The verger softly closed the door behind him, and went mildly and patiently to meet the lady, who had now come within sight.



## II

EVEN when the Englishman had gained the sanctuary of the tower, he hurried up the stairway without a halt until he came upon a broad landing; he had already run half the length of this, with a restless eye upon the ascending steps at its other end, when suddenly haste forsook him. He stopped and turned aside, once more the image of inconsequence, to lean his folded arms upon the wooden rail of the landing, and to wonder at the hurly-burly of his moods. The morning and its happenings all crowded into one instant's vivid thought, flashed before him: since the old door had swung to upon its complaining hinges and the hours had been gathered to the company of irrevocable things, all was stark nothingness. He laughed aloud.

An echo leapt out of the silence round him and shouted in his ear as though to startle him into heed of his surroundings. The wooden stairway zig-zagged upward through



## The Tower Maiden

the dimness, a huge intricate skeleton of props and beams; the side of the tower rose sheer above him, and melted overhead in twilit grayness. Here and there the masonry was pierced by narrow loopholes, and within each there opened a tiny fan of light: but the windows spread no brightness; rather, it seemed, the light was thrusting curious fingers from without into some forbidden place where day must never come. Beyond the tower, faint living noises of the town—the note of a human voice, the murmur of traffic—beat upon the walls and fell back, like surges from a cliff. No sound that struck from without raised any answering reverberation in the tower; and yet the musty silence, unresponsive as a dead ear to voices of the common world, was full of lurking echoes that fell, like troops of mischievous and hungry elves, upon every sound that stirred within the hollow shaft, and tossed and flung it upward from one to another, each parodying it afresh, until it dissolved above in fantastic whisperings.

The idle stranger heard his own laughter mount upward and die out in strange babblings far overhead, as though in its ascent it had become articulate and told of mysteries.



## The Tower Maiden

When the silence of the tower re-descended like a load upon his ear, he found for a little while employment for his eager aimlessness in striving to compel his mortal senses to render him an interpretation of the inhuman travesty that the echoes put upon the sounds he gave them to carry into the immensity overhead. He spoke, and heard his own words again in ghostly repetition from the wall before him; then, from wall and stairway, many voices, speaking strange tongues, came down to him faintly and more faintly, from immeasurable altitudes, till last of all a whisper sounded, from the depths of infinity, or in the portals of his ear—all but articulate, telling of wonders—and died. His understanding leapt at the sound, and bruised itself on the locked silence.

He called a question, beat his hands upon the rail and stamped his foot upon the boards: always there came from above in answer to each that final drowning echo that left the senses vainly striving to read a portent in it, as the waking senses strive to reimagine splendid unremembered dreams.

He stood at last and felt the silence fall about him, palpable and choking. For a



## The Tower Maiden

moment he quailed before the rush of vain impulses that assailed him—as the wont is of idle, unreflecting youth that is born to run a-tilt at circumstance—showing him a lusty life, love, and a clanging, jolly world go roystering by while he lay hidden from it, bound upon a rock. Here, as the image of his fate, were the hollow silence and the mocking echo for his portion, and at his elbow, with impenetrable walls between, a sunny world.

He could see beneath him the sunken doorway, with its mighty lock and hinges: his sanctuary had become a prison. Memory once again swept through the forenoon, glorifying it; its miseries seemed petty now—food for mere amusement, or to be ignored; the rest glowed like a pageant. And yet to dwell upon it was despair. The gift, that had been his but a moment ago, of finding comfort in trifles, or strength in others' sorrow; the gift of world-forgetting indolence; or of withdrawing, when the nagging present grew unbearable, to serene heights of contemplation—seemed lost irrevocably. All that was to come was as sterile, as bereft of the joy of living, as dim and silent and stung by hopeless longing,



## The Tower Maiden

as the moment. It is the way of youthful memory, to irradiate the past, even past miseries ; to make futile the moment with inaction, and to see its blighting shadow thrown upon the morrow and all the days to come. The black despair of lonely adolescence—immedicable, when it falls, as the sorrow of childhood—was upon him.

Recollection hung an instant, poised on its relentless wing, above that moment in the market-place, when he had been snatched from his vacancy, had scanned the tower windows for the man-at-arms, and had seen instead elusive grayness. His mind leapt from its drowning blackness at the memory, and clung to it. Here was a call to action ; the re-awakened body stirred at the summons ; his eyes sought once more the ascending stairway and his feet moved towards it. The sound of footsteps roused the echoes, and again the whisper came down from above, as from the borderland of speech and silence. He plodded briskly yet stealthily up the stairway.

In this manner he set two winding, narrow flights behind him, and paused in his passage of the third railed landing to look down and upward. In the half light of the tower, the



## The Tower Maiden

naked wall sunk now into groundless vacancy, and dissolved overhead towards unimaginable heights. An elemental fear leapt in his vitals ; and upon that, despair returned, to point out with inexorable finger his own body and spirit in this moment as living tokens of all the tragical futility of man's life. Man, like this one, babbled of purpose and spent his strength in the pursuit of ghosts and echoes ; his life, like this one, was but a flash of terror springing from, and returning to, darkness eternal.

He found, presently, that his feet were tramping dully beneath him, bearing up countless stairs and past innumerable landings the body of a tired labourer, topped by a head that was comfortable within, and grossly incapable for evermore of any intenser thought than for the dull body's welfare. A windowed chamber upon the stairway caught his eye, and he looked in, to find that it enclosed a mazy pyramid of cogged and dusty wheels and a great bell crusted over with green, like aged metallic lichen. The hammer raised an iron fist in everlasting threat to strike ; the metal beneath it bore a shining bruise. The seconds ticked secretly, deep in the heart of the clock-work. An age, or a moment, had passed since



## The Tower Maiden

the door beneath had closed ; he had climbed, it might be, midway toward the stars ; yet he was but on a level with the weathered clock-face and the church roof ; more than half the height of the tower was yet above him.

He climbed steadily upward, step by step in even mood ; the reminder of his whereabouts had soothed him like a touch of friendliness in solitude. The echoes broke and died above him ; and the inarticulate mutterings returned. He was now master of his mind, and kept a steady eye upon it ; but it showed him a blurred page. That touch of reality had restored him to sanity and measured time. He had set out upon a fool's errand ; he would go on and prove its folly, drawing wisdom from the acknowledgment of his self-deception. He told and retold himself as he climbed that the page was to remain blurred, the echoes mute, and as barren of guidance or portent as the air. Above him, in the tower-head, there was naked emptiness—no more : he would explore the place, look from it beneath him at the steepled town and abroad to the ring of the horizon, and come down again—hungry, a plain man upon a common world, finding a solid purpose in solid things.



## The Tower Maiden

Protesting thus, and forecasting resolutely that at the tower-head he would come upon a dusty eyrie that in its stark bareness would heal him of his sick fancyings for evermore, he found his further ascent barred by a closed door.

Protest and prophecy fell dead, giving way to conviction : the blurred page was clear, the echo had become articulate ; each gave its word—Expectancy.



### III

A TINY loophole in the tower wall let in a finger of light that showed a twisted bell-pull and a notice that stood beneath it, bidding the visitor to ring. The Englishman pulled, timidly, and the answer came in four faint singing bell-notes from above. The outer latch clicked as though invisible fingers had pressed it, and a voice that seemed to speak gently at his ear—for it possessed the magic of fine violin-notes, and passed like a spirit through the oaken panels—bade him push open the door and enter.

A riotous fancy had instantly, upon the sounding of that voice within, set before him a radiant embodiment of its possessor, with a finger on the latch; mysterious, true and sensitive as echo; elusive as gray shadow; speaking in music and giving to common words and things the thrill that transcends wisdom; pure as unbreathed air; yet blood-warm, animate, brimful of maiden mischief



## The Tower Maiden

withal—why, else, lift the latch and leave the door unopened? So, surely, the finest and fairest of maids admit their lovers.

The Englishman slowly pushed the door open and back to the wall, and saw within, beneath his lowered eyebrows, bare boards and the lower steps of an ascending stairway, and nothing more.

Bitter disillusionment and a living fear contended within him as he stood, pressing back the door and facing the inhospitable emptiness. Then his eyes, seeking a solution to this marvel, turned to the latch. A string was fastened to the inner side, and stretched thence upward. His eyes fastened upon it as a clue, and were slowly and wonderingly raised to follow it.

The string was clasped at the stairhead in the hand of just such a maid as he had fancied, and she was smiling and beckoning. The Englishman took his hand from the door and made to run up impetuously, but the maid above loosed the string and let fall both her hands, and ceased her smiling. The door swung to with a crash. The Englishman stood still upon the third step.

He had hastened toward the maid of his



## The Tower Maiden

fancy, who had whispered mysteriously to him in the echoes, who had lifted the latch when he came and had bidden him enter, who had smiled and beckoned: the thud of the closing door fell upon his senses like a blow upon the face of a dreamer, waking him to recognition of the laws of life and action, the burden of consequence. He raised a hand that he might salute the living woman, that he might reassure her—for manifestly he had startled her by his assault of the stairs—and found himself bare-headed: the hand stayed, pressed to his temple, while, during a pause of uncounted time, the maid and he looked at one another in silence.

The stairway ran upward some five-and-twenty steps; to right of it rose the bare tower wall, to the left it was flanked by ancient boards, that were topped by a level baluster. By the broad light that fell upon the girl, and by the glimpse of tall windows in the room above, he knew that she stood in the tower-head, in the place that he had scanned from beneath in search of the man-at-arms, and where he had felt rather than seen the fleeting shadow.

When the girl loosed her hold of the string, and the beckoning hand fell at her side; and



## The Tower Maiden

when the brightness in her face was followed by a spasm of fear and the deep rebuking look of wounded and defenceless modesty, the Englishman raged within himself at his gaucherie. But if there was rebuke and fear in the scared look of the girl, there was presently, even before the silence between them was broken, the sign of penitence that in her haste she had misread him. The brightness was restored to her face, and with it the warm colour returned. She left the stairhead, as though extending a free welcome to his coming, and turned aside to rest her hands upon the baluster and look down at him.

“The gentleman is, then, alone?”

“I am alone, yes.” Remorse had driven him to be gloomily punctilious. “It is, perhaps”—his vocabulary refused the office of hinting an immediate retirement, so that he was driven upon gesture: his hand pointed at the door, and the eyebrows looked an inquiry, “—— I am to depart?”

She stooped a trifle towards him. “But the gentleman has, doubtless, climbed these many steps—oh, hundreds, do I not know!—that he may behold the view. It is also wondrous, the view.”



## The Tower Maiden

His sparse vocabulary returned in force from its hiding. "It is true, yes. But, as the *Fräulein* says, I am alone. And there are many towers——" The hand fell to his side.

She remained, resolutely, the simple dealer who has goods on view and is set upon persuading a shy customer to inspect them. She spread a hand towards the windowed room behind her. "Oh, many towers, yes; but, surely, no tower like this one."

He nodded upward, and eagerly borrowed her words. "Truly, there is no tower like this one."

"Oh, none, none indeed; none so high, nor with so many windows, so that one may see the whole world below." It was a deft acknowledgment of his tribute to the peculiar fascination of this tower.

"Is the view, then, so fine?"

"Ach"—her hands met in a modest ecstasy—"the view? And, today, the weather—it is heavenly!" She leaned forward again, stooping further than before. "The great country, so fresh and green, one may behold it thus"—she spread out a pretty hand beneath her eyes, and peered closely at it—"so clearly. The house where I was born," she pointed behind



## The Tower Maiden

her, "it is many leagues distant: yet, truly, I can believe to see the pigeons on the roof, and cherries on the trees. And"—she stooped again, speaking in a half whisper as if imparting a cherished secret—"the furthest hills, one may almost count their pine-trees to-day. But beyond them, to the South"—she looked mysteriously down at him, between thumb and fingers spanning a precise measurement—"one may behold this moment, the Alp, peeping up just so high! One may come here for a hundred days and not see this wonderful thing. They say that it brings good fortune, to behold the summit of the white Alp."

The Englishman, with his eyes fixed upon the maid's eyes as they shone betwixt her spanned fingers, was coming slowly up the stairway. As he moved, her hand fell and a burning blush overspread neck and face. As the distance between them narrowed, her eyes dropped and she stood silent.

She remained thus, mute in embarrassment, even when he had reached the level floor and stood close to her. At his entrance she had rebuked him for his haste; there was a helpless beseeching of him now that he would not misinterpret her eagerness to detain him.



## The Tower Maiden

For one instant the Englishman stood in an embarrassment as deep and withering as her own, and cast a look at the doorway beneath. In the next instant he rallied at the call of finer counsel, that bade him succour the girl in the misery of shyness that his clumsiness and her trust of him had cast upon her. Beneath the girl's right hand as it rested on the baluster there lay a piece of simple embroidery. A cross had been stitched with crimson thread upon the canvas, and the beginning of a border or a superscription to the cross was showing in a single curve; from this hung a loop of crimson thread that passed through the eye of the needle where it had been thrust into the canvas. The girl's right hand with its thimbled finger half hid the cross. The Englishman, as he saw the deep colour gathering again in her face beneath his scrutiny, moved away to one of the seven tall windows that pierced the tower-head and lighted up the great bare chamber. His senses reeled, then rose in a fine exhilaration as he saw far down beneath him, miniature and serene in the sunlight, the clustered town, the mapped continent of woods and fields and the far encircling hills—as clear in their lines and hollows as a



## The Tower Maiden

cameo lying in the palm, yet tintured with the blue immensity that, as it seemed, broke away beyond, from their very feet.

"It is wondrous," he said, without turning; and, for her comfort, he strove sedulously to assume the voice of the time-driven and hungry sightseer—"wondrous; and the Alp, where must one look for that?"

"If the kind gentleman will come this way, so may he behold it."

Following her directions, but without lifting his eyes to her face, he was led to the window on his right, beyond the stairhead. As he made his way thither, he knew that his ruse had told; her voice spoke to him of confidence restored. He placed himself at the window; she took her stand behind him and pointed to the far horizon.

He saw, in a break of the blue-green, piny hills that seemed to bound the solid world, a snowy pinnacle, exquisitely clear, and yet—in its contrast to the green earth of celestial whiteness and pale shadow—as remote and inaccessible as a star.

"Where I point. Does the gentleman see?"

"I see, yes." His eyes had left the Alp, though without a movement of the head, and



## The Tower Maiden

were fixed upon the hand with its pointing finger that was thrust out beside his arm. "And they say that it brings good fortune, to behold—this?"

The hand was withdrawn. "To the faithful, yes: it is what the old people say. I cannot tell."

"I can well believe it," he answered with conviction. He suppressed an impulse to turn and look into her face, and moved to another window.

He set himself—that he might bring no further embarrassment upon her—to play the part of the tourist, intent only on the scene. With half a mind, that responded in dull words to what she pointed out to him in town and country, he stockishly overplayed the part; with half a mind, that ran unfettered upon his journey up the tower stairs—glowing already in his memory with the magic colours of the unattainable—he was assured that the woman speaking and breathing at his shoulder now, was the one whom fancy had created from the portent of the echoes and the promise of the voice.

At first upon his entry, and again at his ascent of the stairway, the stranger had shown



## The Tower Maiden

himself a master of the art that is to woman-kind the most endearing. He had allayed her confusion by turning his back upon her. When the maid, recovering her serenity, came now to stand behind him and point out the snowy Alp, it looked as though she went to join a trusted comrade.

When they passed to the next window, and she saw him still obstinately turned from her, and heard his flat and dull acknowledgment that he had seen and noted what she pointed out to him, his mood and manner were for a while reflected in her own, and as custodian of the tower-head she offered him, in her pretty sing-song voice, the bald inventory of what lay spread beneath it.

From the third window there showed beneath them, rising up commandingly from the wilderness of crinkled red tiles, one high-pitched roof. The beams and window frames in the peaked gable that it presented to the tower were deeply carved in many curious devices, so the Englishman was informed by the voice behind him. The designs, it was natural—so the voice told—were not to be distinguished from such a height as this; but the chimneys—did the gentleman observe the chimneys?



## The Tower Maiden

He answered dully, No, he had not perceived them.

"No? That is, however, remarkable. The chimneys are very famous. And the house: it is not possible that the gentleman does not know who was born and lived, also died there?"

No, the gentleman was not aware.

The voice behind him had changed its tone: it was as though a violin, mechanically played upon hitherto, had been given into subtler hands. The maid's tried confidence in him had, as it seemed, aroused in her a sparkle of pique at his unresponsiveness. "No? The gentleman has been in this town—how long, perhaps?"

"Two—three days, I think."

"Two—perhaps three days, and has not yet seen the house of"—she named the Olympian of mediæval times who was soldier, craftsman and artist too.

"Yes, oh yes," he answered in profound weariness, as he leaned a hand against the mullion. "I have heard much of him."

She was doubly piqued at this indifference to her town's hero, and to herself. She drew close behind the stranger.

"We of this place are proud of our great townsman; there are few travellers who come



## The Tower Maiden

here, very few, even of the English, who are so dark-souled—what you call *kröstie* in your home-speech, is it not?—very few, that do not show some interest when they behold this.” And as before she thrust out the hand by his arm and pointed. “The gentleman has even, possibly, not observed the vane that stands there on the Master’s roof, and has not heard the tale that is told concerning it—no?”

Again his eyes sought the hand. He knew well the story of that vane with its marvels wrought in beaten iron by the hands of the old craftsman himself, and of its surmounting golden angel, whose face was turned and held by the outstretched wings to look for ever in the eyeball of the wind. He knew it, but it had fallen hitherto upon his ears—like all else that he had heard intoned from the scarlet guide-book—dead as a problem in mathematics. He had a mind to hear it live. “I see—I have seen—the vane. But the tale they tell of it?”

“In ancient times, they say, the Master of that house—who could teach every worker his handicraft, and tell the oldest captain how to make war, and who was wiser than any book-man—sent out a warning to the city fathers



## The Tower Maiden

that a terrible robber baron was making ready in secret to fall upon the town with his cruel soldiery, who had no pity—not for women, even, or little children. There had been peace in the land for many years; our burghers had grown rich; the soldiery was idle; and even at their watch by the gates they drank deeply, and often slept; every one was prosperous—they say that the beggars in the streets were fat and impudent.

“And so, when the Master warned them of their peril they laughed, and jeered at him; and boys ran after him in the streets and cried out, ‘Kill-joy!’ One day, the elders of the town had appointed to meet the people in the market-place, in order to bid them be ready to attend, a week later, at a great festival that was to be held in honour of a mighty victory won by the townsmen long ago.

“So the burghers in their robes and chains, and the armed soldiery, and all the townsfolk, met together to arrange the feasting. Now, when the Burgomaster was making his speech to the populace and bidding them deck their houses, and promising that whole oxen should be roasted in the market-place, and that wine should flow for all, the Master came from his



## The Tower Maiden

house there, and forced his way through the crowd and called to the Burgomaster in a great voice to be still.

“The crowd, they say, stood silent, for very fear of the Master’s daring. Then one man, a stranger with a great red beard, whose hat was pulled low down upon his forehead, and who stood near the city fathers, and face to face with the Master, cried out, ‘Stone him, for he is a traitor!’

“The crowd snarled upon that like a hungry wolf: but the Master pointed his finger at the breast of the stranger and bade those nearest him to pluck away his hat, so that all might see his face. It was done: and the Red Beard and the Master looked into one another’s eyes. Then the Master raised his hand and pointed to the eastward—towards the castle of the robber baron who, as he had vowed, was plotting mischief against the town—and then to the heaven above him.

“And in a mighty voice, that sounded in the furthest corner of the market-place, he called upon Heaven—because the people would not heed him—for a sign that his words were true; that upon the night of their revelry, when the soldiers were sleepy with wine, the



## The Tower Maiden

enemy would come to the city wall ; and that a traitor, who stood amongst them now, would open the gate from within.

“There was silence in the market-place ; and presently a murmur ran, for every citizen was saying to his neighbour that Heaven had spoken, and every man’s face was turned one way.

“It was such a summer day as this, and the wind was blowing warm out of the West. When the Master came from his house, the angel above it stood facing to the westward. But, as the Master had cried to Heaven for a sign, the angel had slowly turned his face and looked, while one might count a hundred, to the East, towards the place where, as the Master had told, enemies were gathering to destroy the town. It was a marvel ; for the wind still came strongly out of the West. The people saw it, and murmured, wondering and afraid.

“But the Master kept his eyes upon the face of the stranger ; and when he heard the people murmur that he had spoken the truth, he pointed again to the Red Beard’s breast and said, ‘He is the traitor.’

“It was true ; the Red Beard was seized,



## The Tower Maiden

and the people would have torn him in pieces where he stood ; but the Master bade them to spare him yet awhile, that, when the enemy came, they might see him, and believe the town still unprepared. They came, on the night appointed, but the town was ready—and——”

She faltered, as the Englishman turned to face her.

“And—it is the story, sir, as I have heard it. These are not my words. It was so the tale was told to me, by my father.”

The Englishman had remained, leaning his hand upon the stone mullion and staring—sharply at first, then with unfocussed eyes—at the winged angel far beneath him. At the sound of the tale, told thus at his ear, the dead awoke, massed and breathing ; he caught the very ring of the old craftsman’s voice, saw and believed the wonder on the house-top, and yet stood aloof and a spectator, and beheld the whole living pageantry as clearly as though it had been cast upon a screen. Throughout the long forenoon his senses, the messengers of strange moods, had been sent upon hopeless errands into the unfathomable beyond—had been driven to the pursuit of dying echoes,



## The Tower Maiden

of the very shadow of a thought, to seek an answer to the riddle of his life—and had returned, to despair, and to the mockery of common things. He had been as one who, while broad awake, had bruised his hands with beating at the locked door that barred the way to dreams and death.

And now the door, when he had turned away from it, had been opened, and a voice was speaking to him from beyond its threshold. As the tale drew near its close and as the radiant picture that it called up before him threatened to dissolve in the hard light of day, he turned.

The maid had come to stand so close behind his shoulder that, as he faced her, the hand that he had leaned against the stonework lightly brushed her sleeve as he turned; and she was so near him, her upturned face so close to his, that the living sweetness of her breath and body was in the air about him.

He stood as he had turned, and she did not move. As he met the eyes that looked up into his, they were not mortal eyes; she had spoken across the threshold of that doorway that parted man's life from the mysterious immensity that lies beyond it. She was a



## The Tower Maiden

fantasy, and stood shaped for a moment in the likeness of man's finest aspiration—the ideal that he follows his life through, and never overtakes: she was like that which her voice had called up in him, a vivid unreality, and like it she would, in a moment, vanish. Then with his breathing came that warm fragrance of innocence in its bloom, like a messenger waking him to the heed of present things. His senses went forth, but not now to eternal emptiness: the door that had opened upon dreams was closed; but she who had spoken from within it had crossed the threshold out of shadowland and stood with him here, in the living present. He looked down at her with the eyes of a man who has stumbled from infinite confusion upon self-knowledge; who has attained to his heritage of passion, because he has sought and seen incarnate his own and the world's desire.

Her eyes fell before his burning look; her fingers strayed in the folds of her dress, were knit together, and loosed. When she looked up again there was a tremor of the eyelids as though a curtain had been withdrawn, revealing hidden depths. He saw the surrender of a soul.



## The Tower Maiden

He stood away from her, and set his back to the stone window frame, and during an interval of suspended time his eyes clung to hers. Desire, that visits men to strengthen or destroy, had leapt up in him; had bidden him put forth his man's might ruthlessly, as an armed freebooter, to consume, to ravish, to possess. A child, infinitely trustful of his strength, had thrust its hand in his. A woman had given him the treasure of her life to guard; he would dare the whole world in her defence. In an instant he had found order in chaos, a key to all the mysteries. He, the selfless, had found himself and eternal peace in giving self to another—she was beside him as they passed together through a wilderness of suns.

She was speaking. "So the tale was told to me, by my father."

"By your father," he repeated. The sound of human speech was like a hand held out to one buffeted and drowning in a torrent. "By your father; and he—learned it?"

"Also from his father. It has been handed down thus by my people, the father to the son, for many years—I think there is no one knows how many—the son following the father.



## The Tower Maiden

Each has told this to the other; and always one of my people has kept watch here in the tower. They call us in the town—the gentleman may have heard it—the Heaven-folk.”

He nodded, wonderingly. His sense was struggling dimly as a new-born thing fights for breath. “The Heaven-folk. And the maids also; have they kept the tower as you keep it?”

“Ah, no. I am the first maiden who has come here. I am also, it is probable, the last. When my father went out to the war, then my mother could not sleep at night for thinking of his danger; and when the news came that he was wounded, and that it was not likely she would see him any more, my mother died.”

“And your father?”

“He returned, yes; but he could no longer climb these many stairs to keep the tower, having now but one leg.”

He had ridden, she said, and had got his wound, as trooper in a charge of horse. She named the fight; it rang in the Englishman’s ears with the tremendous note that Balaklava strikes.

“And now he keeps the church below, is it not true?”



## The Tower Maiden

"He keeps the church below, yes; and I watch here in the tower. We two, my father and I, are the last of our race—of the Heaven-folk, as we are called."

She had kept her eyes steadfastly upon him. The depths that, when the fire had run in his blood, had been laid open, were hidden now. When silence fell between them, his thought was flung again upon the wonder of exaltation that had risen in him, to find it nothing but a soundless tumult. When he looked now at the maid before him with living eyes, and sought in her the avowal that together, as twin souls, they had read the secrets of infinity, she was remote, aloft upon eternal summits, inscrutable.

She spoke again, repeating, as before, her last words; and again it was as though the very sound of her quiet speech had held him up in drowning waters and had set him by her, on the good earth, bidding him hold his thoughts within mortal compass, and set his eyes upon the possible.

He braced himself to heed the saving counsel, and prompted her with his questions to continue the story of her people and of the isolation of some one of them, from



## The Tower Maiden

generation to generation, here in the watch-tower. At each interchange of simple words, the woman that he had seen looking out from eternal heights over the world of men beneath her, came downward and towards him, until she stood at last beside him, a human maid, adorned with simple, human loveliness.

Yet, even now, when his devotion to the commonplace and an ignoring of unutterable things had proved the warm fellowship between them, he had come thereby but on the beginning of another chapter in the tale of wonders that had been begun when he had sought refuge in the tower. As her blush had told him at his coming, he had stirred an elemental terror in her, and had allayed it. He had shown reckless passion, and she had answered with surrender, transforming his recklessness to devotion. He had responded to the call, only to find her immeasurably removed from him. And now—now that their discourse of common things had fashioned her to his eyes a very human, sweet and comely maid—she seemed but as an unremembering witness of it all, as oblivious as the sea is of its wrecks. She turned upon him now, in answer to his plain questions, eyes of pure



## The Tower Maiden

innocence, totally unafraid: he looked into them, seeking the confession that they had read with him the inmost secrets of life, and he saw no answer. Instead, he found himself entirely quit of his perplexity in a fond study of her eyes of living blue: the rayed iris of each was ringed in by a circlet of deeper colour.

She turned away, and was again the symbol of all mystery.

"There I was born," she said, and pointed to a far speck of earthy red, where a cottage roof glowed amongst green woods; behind it the steep pine-forests rose sombrely, and melted into filmy blue. "There my mother died, when she learned of my father wounded in the war." She pointed nearer at hand where, beyond the old ramparts of the town, the level green of tillage and pasture land was broken by a walled enclosure. There, a grove of ancient cypresses held their branches above the gravestones; in the distance and in the surrounding brilliancy, the limbs and foliage were like outspread bat-wings, and a tall monument shone snowy white against them. "My mother lies there," she said, "and the white pillar has been set up to the memory



## The Tower Maiden

of our soldiers who went out to the war from our town and its neighbourhood, and have not returned."

The Englishman had seen, yesterday, the fluted column, the winged angel of Victory that surmounted it, holding out her laurel crown, and the names of the dead men written on the plinth; and all had been as mute as the marble itself. Now—as before he had beheld the wonder in the market-place—pictures of war, its pageantry and woe, flared and died before him: the plumed squadrons mown down in bloody swathes; pale women dying far away, of fear; the earth receiving in silence all the dead alike; scythesmen, with their plodding, quiet swing, at work in the ripe corn on last year's battlefield.

She raised her finger again and followed with it the road that left the town and ran past the cemetery, and on, a white fillet on the chequered floor of green, until it entered and was lost among the northern hills: "It is where my people have come, so my father tells, out of the North, where it is cold."

"The South is kinder, yes. Your people came out of the North, then, long ago?"

"Ach, so long! Before the Master lived,



## The Tower Maiden

in the house below there. It was my forefather, so they tell, who watched here in the tower when the miracle was wrought on the Master's house-top."

"And they came out of the North—why?"

"Because of their faith. It was in a time of great wars; and they suffered there, and many were slain, because they would not cease praying to the Holy Mother."

"Because of their faith, yes."

She was still standing with her back to him. After pointing out the northern road, she had laid the finger-tips of the right hand upon a window sash; and as she had made mention of the old craftsman and the miracle, the Englishman had lowered his eyes to the market-place far beneath him.

He looked down at the spot among the tented stalls where he had stood to watch the tower windows. As the maid told in her quiet voice of forefathers slain, oppressed, and hunted because of their faith, his eyes withdrew themselves from the scene below, and were fixed upon the bend of her waist and then upon the falling skirt. It was as plain as the vestment of a nun, and of a soft and cloudy grey. A passing glimpse of it, from



## The Tower Maiden

without, and afar, would seem like shadow—to the eye of fancy, like a spirit.

Truly, the voices he had heard in the hollow tower had become articulate: the darkest mystery of the world was made plain. The grim fighting men had come out of the North, and were dead; the war between flesh and spirit was done; and faith and gentleness had triumphed. Here was the pledge of it: he had seen the last remainder of a race of fierce-eyed men—a maimed soldier who kept the keys of God's house; and a maid, who lived her days here, high up above the roystering earth, alone.

On the wall to his right, between the window where they were standing and the next—the seventh and last of all—there hung a little crucifix, above a prie-Dieu. The Englishman's eyes were led to these.

“For their faith,” he repeated, “yes. In the church there is peace.”

She faced him suddenly now, and saw his eyes upon the crucifix. “But the gentleman is of our faith, perhaps? And is yet of the English, who, who——?” She told him, with a shrug and a little inward moan and a spreading of the hands that, in matters of faith, she found his race-folk unintelligible.



## The Tower Maiden

“Who drive out the true believers, as your fathers were driven? Perhaps: I have not done this; but I am English, from the North. Yes. And, no, I am not of your faith.”

He had spoken bluntly, resentfully, against the implication of dull-wittedness that she had cast upon his kinsfolk. But his anger was purely personal: if he was, outwardly, the champion of his race, at heart he was the lover in revolt against his mistress' unresponsiveness. For, once again, to look in her face had been for him to behold in her no symbol of all the woes and wonders of humanity, but a maid—who had awaked him to the knowledge of the love of man for woman; and who, now, a moment later, held him but as the type of a soulless race.

Her eyes fell before the onset of the look that followed on his words: before the eyes fell, their depths again were opened to him.

She looked down at her hands, folding and refolding the fingers in silence for a moment. Once again an unfathomable pause fell between them; but not now as at their first meeting. She was never more to know that elemental fear of him; he had outgrown the mad haste and withering embarrassment that make a lie



## The Tower Maiden

of every look and movement of youth's impetuosity. In the last unveiled look that she had given him there was the woman's confession and surrender, as before, and the child's trust; but there was more.

The trust had been given and the surrender made, in blindness and in fear, because they had been passion-driven; they had been given, and were not betrayed; that last look into the woman's soul declared the trust made perfect and the surrender whole—through trial.

The deepest longing in him was stilled. The maid there, folding and refolding her hands, was his, and perfect. Together they had been borne upon the wings of passion, into the immense, to the gates of death and of infinity; he had seen then, in her eyes, the unfathomed depths beyond, where the souls of women go to bring new lives into the world. Thus she had come to stand with him for deeper mysteries than are known to man—thus she must stand always, and be always the dearer for it; it set a halo round her womanhood.

He looked about him, at the windows of the tower: each window stood with him for a span of the years that they had lived to—



## The Tower Maiden

gether—they who had found fellowship in the dread mystery of passion, and good comradeship through devotion and subservience to the little things of every day.

His look returned, to dwell again upon the maid. She stood as before, but now with quiet hands. The colour was once more—but now slowly—gathering in her cheeks; he turned away from her to the last window, and in a moment she joined him there.

They stood now face to face, leaning backward against the embrasure of the window, with their hands behind them, and talked, with the clear frankness of children and aged folk, of themselves, in world-forgetting intimacy.

Now that he told her of himself, of his loveless childhood and despairing, lonely adolescence, of his foreignness to his own kindred and their ways, that had made a misery of his years—all that had rendered his life a welter of misunderstandings grew clear, and was ended by the mere telling in her attentive ear.

In his case, the blind god circumstance had thrust him into the outer darkness of spiritual isolation; in hers, the relentless forces of tradition had set her here, above the common world,



## The Tower Maiden

last of the race of Heaven-folk, the servant of passing strangers: each had been absolved from obedience to the ordinary laws, and they had met together, like two unsubject planets, in the void.

As they had met in spirit, so they stood now—face to face in the embrasure of the window, full in the light of day, set in the public eye so that the whole town beneath might see them; and yet as far aloof from men, as utterly alone together as though they were in the heart of ocean solitudes.

“Where do you live, then, in the town?” she asked at length, breaking in upon a pause in their conversation.

The question led his eyes downward and across the wilderness of roofs. As he looked, he winced as though struck in the face; he had seen one distant roof, standing shoulder high above the rest about it. It was the hotel; the inexorable clock-hand must be close upon the hour of noon. “I must go,” he said.

She was looking down when his eyes returned to her, and was again slowly clasping and unclasping her hands.

The maid and the great room were dissolving about him like a dream, and he was falling,



## The Tower Maiden

out of heaven, down and down, into the gross, earthy dulness of a world below. "And when I am gone," he said, "you will be alone."

She held the fingers clenched now, and nodded slowly downward at them. "Alone, yes, often."

The vision was dissolving still; he was sinking, and was at war already with the brutal facts that he had fled from to the tower; she was receding—withdrawing upward to her eternal heights again. "Alone! And I—— But many travellers come here, is it not?"

"Oh, many. I am seldom lonely."

He was seizing recklessly upon the first words that came to his tongue, and flinging them hotly forth: "Alone, here, or with stupid travellers—stupid travellers and their guide-books. It is impossible." He stopped, amazed at his own vehemence, wondering what had stirred it in him.

"Many of them are kind," she said in a small voice. She still stood with lowered eyes, and hands tightly held together.

"Many are kind—it may be, yes. Not all, then. And you are alone, here, always, is it not?"

"I am alone, yes. I am, however, safe.



## The Tower Maiden

The travellers come here many at a time : and if one is unkindly, then others are good, so I am safe."

He remembered his own coming, and the terror it had raised in her : "And if one comes alone, as I came, and is evil-minded, as I seemed ?"

"Ah, my father is always below. He watches over me, and admits none to the tower alone—none who would harm me."

He remembered the old man's hesitancy, and his searching look. "But if your father were deceived ?"

Still with lowered eyes she spread out her hands and clasped them again. "The Holy Mother is here with me," she whispered.

"Your fathers were killed because of their faith in her," he said.

She was withdrawing upward ; he was falling from her into blackness, and beating the air as he fell.

Suddenly she raised her eyes to his, and with a rapid movement undid the latch at his elbow and threw open the window. He looked as she pointed, and saw now for the first time that two of the protecting iron bars without were gone. He stared down into the



## The Tower Maiden

sheer, hideous depth, at crawling pigmies in the streets, at the high gables, and the red roofs quaking in the sunlight. His fingers clung to the edge of the stone behind him; the floor within and the window ledge outside were on one level, and beyond the ledge was death.

He saw her close and latch the window, but he still kept his eyes upon the gulf outside. "My fathers died," he heard her say, "for their faith. It was the Holy Mother told me this, how I might find safety with her also, if one came here alone who was evil-minded, to harm me."

"It was you, then, who——?"

"I cut the bars, yes."

"And your father knows?"

"Not my father. Only the good priest, an old man, who said I had done well to seek protection this way, since the Holy Mother had guided me: only the good priest, and now—you."

He still kept his eyes upon the open depths, and she went on. "No one has seen it but you. I myself keep the room and clean the windows here. When the workmen have come, they have not noticed, or have said if



## The Tower Maiden

they have seen it, that the Heaven-folk can come to no harm here. You also will keep silence. I think"—her voice fell and she said scarcely above a whisper—"it is now almost noon."

They had looked in turn from each of the seven windows in the room, and were standing now close by the stairhead. She moved slowly apart from him and stood, as she had awaited his ascent, with her hands upon the carved baluster—the right hand resting on the embroidered cross. He moved beside her until they came to the parting of their ways, and like one walking in sleep began the descent. On the first step he paused.

"I shall keep silence," he said, "till I return."

She looked down at him, answering nothing.

He reached up with his left hand, and laid it upon her right, that hid the cross. "Wait for me here," he said again; "I shall return."

She stooped down, bringing her face close to his. "You will return," she whispered. "Now I know it. A'ways, I shall pray for you; and one day, at noon, you will come to seek me here."

She put her lips to his forehead as the great



## The Tower Maiden

bell beneath sounded the first stroke of noon.  
Long after the deep-toned mutterings that  
followed the last stroke had died away she still  
remained looking down at the vacant stairway  
and the oaken door.



## IV

THE Englishman re-crossed the sunny market-place, threading his way amongst the tented stalls, and stood for a moment at the furthest corner to look up at the windows of the tower. As he looked a great cloud sailed past and behind the shaft, low down in the sky. He thrilled for an instant with fear and a strange foreboding: the cloud stood still in the heavens; the tower was vaporous and moved, it was falling and would presently dissolve. He closed his eyes, and opened them: the cloud had passed; the tower was of the earth, and firm on its foundations. He passed along the quiet streets, laughing now and then in exalted pity of the thing that had once been himself, that once had known distress and fear at small annoyances; that had been wont, when it looked within itself, to find despair. He rehearsed the coming scene at the hotel, and saw himself take part in it as he would have done, had this tower—like all the other



## The Tower Maiden

places where he had gone to be alone with his misery—been untenanted. The completed story of his isolation and redemption passed before him, withdrew into a great perspective, and linked itself with the parables of old—with the tales of men who had stumbled long years in darkness and among pitfalls, blind, hopeless, unbelieving, yet steadfast, and had come at last to the light, and to the possession of their souls.

He hurried and lagged alternately on his way through the streets, revelling in the new light and strength within him that, since last he had followed this winding road, had made order and brightness in a dark, chaotic universe.

. . . . .

The eminently practical lady of the guide-book showed little understanding of, and no sympathy with, the elusive vagaries of youth. So long as these were restricted to mere moodiness, to longings after the wholly unattainable, she was in the habit of regarding them as merely a phase in the inscrutable process whereby the boy is made into man. This later stage of changeful adolescence—whence



## The Tower Maiden

the mind at last emerges ready to receive and cultivate the seeds of worldly wisdom—she held as infinitely more tolerable than that earlier one, during which the boy is a mere malignant engine of destruction. Towards the earlier state of the youthful male, the one word “Don’t” summed up the lady’s attitude. When the boy had worn through his filibustering age, and had laid aside his pranks for the pursuit of sentiment, the lady dropped her emphatic negative and withdrew into a watchful neutrality. It was easier to watch than it had been to restrain; the follies of adolescence, like some inevitable sickness, must take their course, and in the fulness of time would land their victim at last upon the threshold of manhood, and amenable to the laws of common sense. But the watch, if silent, must be strict, and keen; the youth must start at last upon his career of responsibility unhampered by any tie formed, or any pledge given, during that period of unwisdom.

Upon the vagaries of this particular youth, the lady was silent, and yet supremely intent. His ravings she let go past her ear like the wind; whatever the wild succession of his moods, she held upon her way, apparently



## The Tower Maiden

unheeding. But as the physician guards a patient lest in his delirium he do himself an injury, so the lady watched this young man for some token in his behaviour that would show him as being set upon the one irreparable act of folly that lies within the reach of unguided youth.

From plentiful experience she knew the look of the young man in love, and his temper, and how to meet it wisely. To her, who was insusceptible to both, passion and folly were alike, in that they brought humiliation and disaster in their train; but dissimilar, in that passion held in leash by expediency was the hall-mark of worldly wisdom, whereas folly was incurable. At her meeting with the young man after his ascent of the tower, she knew from a single comprehensive glance at him, even before he met her eyes, that his foolishness, hitherto dispersed harmlessly amongst impalpable things, had centred upon the human and accessible; his fancy had become flesh, and fell thus within the sphere of action, to be dealt with by those whom Providence had appointed to keep watch upon his welfare.

He had come back to her in the pride of his new strength, invincibly patient to endure



## The Tower Maiden

where he had rebelled ; guarding his secret, as he fondly supposed, by inviolable reticence, holding it as securely from all sacrilegious spying as something that had never been, or had been hidden away in a warm treasury, high above the world, in a room with seven windows.

He had come back armed against the hosts of nagging trifles that had beset him up till now ; the new life was to begin for him in meeting the reproaches of the lady at his mysterious absence—reproaches that had been wont to cut the more deeply when they were unuttered—with cheerful fortitude. When he found her incurious, unexact, entirely amiable, and absorbed in planning for herself a busy afternoon, during which he was entirely and cheerfully absolved from attendance upon her, his new weapons were thrown useless on his hands. When he was considerably urged, for the sake of health and duty, to spend some quiet hours at letter-writing, he wondered dimly, and consented.

The resolute lady set out, totally undaunted by the throbbing heat of afternoon, for the church. Arrived there, she sought the mild verger, and ended a stern cross-questioning of



## The Tower Maiden

him which had been begun in the morning, when he had turned away from closing the ancient tower door upon the young Englishman. The inquisition ended, the lady took her resolute way to the telegraph office, and set the wires busy upon a compact and urgent message to England.

When, at sunset, the Tower Maiden came singing down the stairs, her father was there to meet her. As they came together from the church, the old man stayed behind to lock the door, and the girl came down the steps alone. At the foot of the steps she raised her eyes, to find herself face to face with a stranger, clearly an Englishwoman, whose eyes were fixed upon the girl's eyes in a hard, inquiring stare. The two looked at one another but for an instant; then the elder turned and hurried away. When the girl's father had laboured slowly down the steps and stood beside his daughter, the stranger was gone, and no word of her passed between the two.

The lady returned in the twilight to find the young man sitting chin in hand, above blank sheets, staring out of the window. He started when she spoke to him, and said nothing



## The Tower Maiden

when she gave him a message to read. It notified an imminent crisis in their mutual family affairs.

"We start for home to-morrow," the lady said.

The haste and clangour of a sudden journey, made in company with a brisk and indefatigable companion, landed him, tired to the heart, in England and at home.

At home he was given rest and silence, where he had hoped for tireless curiosity and questionings; and food that was strangely comforting after the cloying, thick decoctions of a grosser people. His tired body welcomed and throve upon these delicacies, and awoke to a new appetite for the things of home that had been little heeded in familiarity, yet sorely missed in absence, and never rightly valued until now. The body, soothed into wholesomeness, reacted on the spirit, that had come prepared to find its own strength in others' bitterness, even as the material parts were to have risen superior to appetite. Instead of an aggressive enmity, there was kindness and forbearance: the hostile company had become ghosts of the imagination, and where the inner



## The Tower Maiden

eye would have looked for an enemy the outer saw everywhere a friend.

He had left the old German town and had been hurried homeward on the plea of urgent affairs ; and on the way he had lived in dread of the family council that was to follow close upon the wrench of leaving and the exhaustion of the journey home. But the council was not called until many days had passed, and until the rest and food and tactful silence had done their healthful work upon him. And, even when he was called to it, the council was nothing of the terrible affair of his anticipation : there was no sustenance offered to his resentment.

He had looked to be browbeaten like a mindless boy, to be harnessed and driven along the hated thoroughfares of convention, to be hectorred and bullied towards the adoption of a way of life that he had come to loathe, in a world that he had forsworn. And he had planned for himself the part that he was to play, had even rehearsed the words by which he would cut himself off from folk and fortune for ever ; he had seen the consternation spread, and had rejoiced in the indignities that would be put upon him.



## The Tower Maiden

But it was as one who had come to the full inheritance of manhood that he was appealed to. He was declared free from the least restraint of authority, and at liberty to choose his own way amongst all the highroads of the world. When he had been given his charter of independence, then, in hard fact and cold arithmetic, the tale of imminent disaster to his immediate kinsfolk was set before him; and of how alone disaster might be averted. There was no hint of compulsion in the recital; the task of withholding an honoured name from blemish and of rescuing those who had nurtured him from threatened calamity, was clearly pointed out to him; and he was left unhindered, to consult with his native sense of honour as to whether he should take up the proffered burden, or let it lie.

Thus, the substantial enemies that he had foreseen betwixt him and his better purpose, dissolved, as he advanced to meet them, into wraiths. And as they dislimned, so the untried purpose that he had come to adhere to and defend, grew, like its enemies, phantasmal also. The world about him, seen through this new atmosphere of friendliness, was a goodlier place than it had ever seemed; and duty called



## The Tower Maiden

with a single stirring voice upon his self-reliance and his honour to quit dalliance and be up and doing: the deeper depths in him that had been moved were still again; the spirit that had stirred within him on the tower stairs, and had lived and spoken in the room with seven windows, gave no answer now when he called to it for guidance—or, if it answered, then the answer was drowned in these clear voices of the world.

The living things about him, when he questioned them, gave him look for look, word for word; the path of duty ran from his feet onward, straight and firm as a metalled road. But when he turned from this broad sunlit clearness of present things and looked for definite counsel in his memory, he stepped from solid earth into a land of twilight and illusion: there, all melted before the direct gaze of the inner vision into nothingness. The tower, when he would have imagined it, swam from its foundations and joined the drifting company of the clouds. He importuned his remembrance to give him back the sounds and portents of that mysterious journey upward: but the echoes were mute, and the heights above him were without end. Or he



## The Tower Maiden

would stand in the room with seven windows: the maiden there was without breath or blood, or warmth; she was the woman of the everlasting peaks — voiceless, inscrutable, as far from him as though the Alp that she had shown him from the tower window had been a visible emblem of eternity and she had been seated, since before time was, upon its summit, looking out amongst a wilderness of suns.

The helmeted tower, the windowed room, the lonely maiden, melted like vapours before the directed eye of memory. Yet memory no sooner turned from them than they were at its shoulder, like a single presence that was felt, that fled in shadow before a centred thought, and yet followed at the heels of thought continually. It took the place in his imagination of all that stealthy company, unheard, unseen, that gives the mysterious thrills to childhood: it was the whisper that becomes a silence to the listening ear; the watching eye that shines in the darkness if one looks askance, but is gone if the eye seeks to gaze upon it; the hooded shapes that stand within half-opened doorways, in unlighted rooms; the creatures, kind or terrible, mightier than men, beneath whose tread the stairways creak



## The Tower Maiden

at night-time as they go about their awesome business. In the scales of judgment it was imponderable; it offered no admonition; itself at most the shadow of a doubt, it cast no shadow forward, and was mute to all questions that were asked of it, through sleepless nights and restless days, upon the hesitancy it had invoked, yet would not guide. Duty and honour seemed to call with one clear voice: and memory stood silent as a nun, finger on lip, with lowered eyes.

He chose to follow the clear bidding, and then hearkened in the silence for a reproof. None came. He had elected to be a man amongst men; he sought now with the eyes of adult good sense for something that had survived of childhood's treasured follies, and could find no trace of it. He was assured that he had done well; he had chosen where duty lay; it seemed, in this kindlier world, a path of flowers; yet that way led towards duty, and he would follow it. A conscience that gave him no reproaches could not be wronged.



## V

THE Tower Maiden stood long as the Englishman had last seen her, stooping forward a little, and looking down the stairway. She seemed to listen as though unseen lips were whispering a message to her inward ear, and stood thus till the sound of lively human voices on the tower stairs broke in upon her senses. Then, as if in blithe obedience to the counsel that had been given her in the silence, she raised her hands, lifted the embroidered canvas by its corners from the rail, and held it suspended at arms' length before her face.

The sound of voices in the tower and of ascending footfalls had drawn near the door. She put her lips to the crimson cross, and ran, folding the canvas as she went, to hide it away in an ancient chest that stood, clamped to the flooring by massive bands of wrought iron, against the wall, hard by the tower window that overlooked the Master's house.

The bell was ringing violently when she



## The Tower Maiden

returned to the stairhead. She pulled the string that ran downward to the latch, and called to the visitors to push the door and enter.

A bulky, florid gentleman stood upon the threshold, looking upward; behind his shoulder a portly lady was panting audibly; behind these showed the faces of a young man and a girl, in both of which was written manifest ill-humour.

“Will the gentlefolk please to come up?” the Tower Maiden said.

They had been talking noisily amongst themselves until the door had opened; now they all looked up together in silence, and hesitated strangely to mount the stairs. The portly gentleman took off his gray soft hat and made way for the stout lady who, with a gesture signifying exhaustion, motioned the younger couple to come forward. But the young man and the girl paid no heed to her, and gazed up wonderingly.

“Who is up there—why do you all stop?” a child’s voice said from behind the rest; and a small girl thrust herself eagerly forward between her elders. As she saw the Tower Maiden above, two great eyes opened wide in



## The Tower Maiden

delight and wonder, and she hurried up the stairs.

The gray-clad figure at the top reached out her right hand as the child came near her; the child seized and clung to it with both her hands and drew herself close against the Tower Maiden at the stairhead, looking up rapturously at her, then beneath at her own folk, who were now slowly climbing. The two above looked down, as though they had been there in lifelong companionship, and were watching the approach of strangers.

The visitors went the round of all the tower windows, and were told in the gentle sing-song of what was outspread beneath them. They showed little sign of understanding what was told them, and little interest in the town below or in the country beyond. Yet they hung with a curious intentness upon the words of the 'girl; they pressed after her together as she moved away from them, and spoke of her in undertones amongst themselves. But when she turned to them, pointing from the window, and telling in her simple words of what was below, they came no nearer, but stood where her eyes had found them, seeming as if their minds were bent upon a deeper



## The Tower Maiden

wisdom that underlay the words; seeming to feel some presence in the place that had been wanting in the church below.

Only the child appeared to divine the cause of the mysterious quiet that had fallen upon the elder folk. Throughout the circuit of the windows she kept possession of the Tower Maiden's hand, sometimes holding it as at first in both her own, sometimes thrusting her fingers with infinite trustfulness to feel its protecting clasp. The two seemed to stand free of the restraint that had touched the others—to be set beyond the consciousness of it, and yet, by the looks that passed between them, to share its secret.

The elder couple went slowly down the stairs and passed the oaken door without casting one backward look: the younger pair turned by one consent as they crossed the threshold, looked once toward the stairhead, and, as the door was softly closed behind them, at each other. The child remained hand in hand with the Tower Maiden.

Not a word passed between them; when the voice of the elder lady came to them presently, calling the child's name urgently again and again from the echoing stairway, she stood on



## The Tower Maiden

tiptoe and tugged fondly at the hand she held, and lifted up her face. The Tower Maiden stooped down, kissed the bright face, and was kissed in turn, and two little arms were held for a moment close about her neck.

When the child was gone and silence had once more fallen in the windowed room and in the tower, she still remained idle at the stair-head, looking with vacant eyes at the door beneath. She stood thus until the bell struck one: the sound recalled her from her reverie, setting her upon the beaten road of habit, trodden by her fathers since the ancient tower was new. It was no maiden dreaming of an absent lover, but the descendant of a long line of soldier-watchmen, who looked from each of the seven windows in the tower, for fire or tumult in the town, for any unaccustomed stir upon the long white roads that threaded the great country from the horizon to the gateways of the town. Today there was peace and sunlight over all. She locked the oaken door, and swinging the heavy key in her fingers she sped down the twilit stairways and across the dim landings, singing now and then below her breath to the measure of her flying feet. Her father would be waiting for her below, press-



## The Tower Maiden

ing back the massive door and looking upward to watch for her coming.

At noon of the day following the one upon which the Englishman had come and gone, the Tower Maiden took from the iron-bound chest her roll of embroidered canvas and laid it upon the carved baluster above the stairway, where it had hung yesterday as the bell announced his coming. She stood as she had stood then—with her right hand upon the cross, her eyes fixed on the oaken door, and with the latch string in her left hand—and listened, until the last lingering echoes had died away in the tower. Then she lifted the canvas by its corners, held it before her face a moment, and put her lips to the cross. When that was done she took it to the table that stood in the centre of the room, sat down, and spread out the embroidery on her knee. The needle with its loop of crimson thread had remained till now as in her confusion she had placed it yesterday, when the Englishman came towards her up the stairway. She drew it out, and made as though to continue an interrupted task. But when she had added, slowly and with lingering care, a single stitch to the unmarked design that had been begun



## The Tower Maiden

above the cross, she thrust the needle back again, looked for an instant at the work with her head drawn back and laid aslant, then rolled up the canvas and hid it away, deep in the ancient chest.

It was to be the pattern of her days to come. At noon each day she came to stand as he had found and left her—as he was to see her when he came again, at noon. And each day of his absence was to be marked by one crimson stitch in her embroidery. No human eyes but her own should look upon this record of her trust—her own, and his, when he should return.

Each day when she had kept her tryst, had marked upon her dateless calendar the emblem of the day departed, and had hidden it away, she would kneel and pray to Jesus and the Holy Mother to guard and guide him who was absent—giving him the strength to remain as she had seen him, true, faithful to that which she had seen in him when she had looked in at the windows of his soul. She did not pray for his return: the petition was selfless: she prayed only that he might live pure in spirit, in loyalty unchanging—let him remain so; then he would be set above the perils of



## The Tower Maiden

this world, and in the fulness of time he would redeem his promise in the way that should be best for him and her. Here she would watch and wait for him every day; he would come at last.

She had been but a child when fate had called her to the office held by her forefathers, to leave the ways of her contemporaries, to show the living beauty and recount past glories of the town to all who came to look from the seven windows of the tower. These travellers were of many minds, from many lands, and in the mind even of the dullest of them, the Tower Maiden and her quiet voice and eyes—the windowed room, the red town and the green landscape as they stood now and as they had been in elder days—were wont to shine, serene and apart from the tangled memories of travel. To the dull mind she gave something of her steady brightness: to the keener witted she gave more. What she was there to tell of she knew so intimately, and told in such clear simplicity, that it seemed a part of herself. She was a living document; she clothed the dry bones of history with flesh; to many a one who came there she was as an oasis of shade and greenery and singing waters



## The Tower Maiden

in the arid plains of life and learning, and she remained to these a fresh and breathing presence in the dull business of their lives. Not one on whom she worked her unconscious influence but would stretch his opportunity to come again. They passed on the word of her, moreover, to others, so that the Tower Maiden was attaining amongst many little groups of thoughtful folk, in many widely-sundered places, to a modest notability as unsought as it was singular.

She was inspiring to the contemplative; but she was receptive too: many a quiet stranger, when he had been touched and quickened by her peculiar charm, would be moved to tell her in return something of himself, of his people and their ways, so distant from her own. To these advances she gave always a quick and true response. It was a delight to hear her pretty stumbling speech when she strove, like a willing child at its lessons, to master little scraps of some alien tongue; to watch her as she laid to heart new meanings, or lent a ready ear to news of distant homes and kindly foreign folk. In these simple ways, the Tower Maiden gave and kept remembrance of an increasing host of friends.



## The Tower Maiden

The first company of visitors to the tower-head since the departure of the Englishman was to stand as the type of a host to follow, who were to be sensible more markedly than heretofore of some deep fascination, some chastening spirit in the room with seven windows and in its occupant. Those who had come there before, and now returned, were to find her bright, serene, responsive as ever; they were to leave her, carrying away the conviction that absence had but ripened intimacy, and that she had grown nearer through severance; and were yet to know that she was in spirit far apart, and set in some inviolable kingdom of her own.

By such as these the shining memory of the Tower Maiden was kept apart in the retrospective treasury. Like the fabled talisman that shone in the dark but was lustreless to the eye of day, the undiscoverable meaning that underlay this singular reminiscence would vanish upon the least attempt to tell of it in common speech. And thus, with many a one, the memory of the tower was struck from the lists of communicable experiences, and set amongst the unuttered secrets of the soul. Cherished thus, it would oftentimes repay its



## The Tower Maiden

guardians by shedding its hidden radiance, in moments of blackest doubt, upon their tangled circumstance, lighting confusion and pointing out the better path.

Through the years of girlhood, life in the tower gave depth and colour to her mind that made for estrangement from her kinsfolk in the town. In the morning she saw them go their simple ways, while she herself withdrew into that world of which no sound could reach them. Every day she would descend to share the midday meal with her father alone; at evening she would find them tired with labour that she had not shared, or seeking pleasures that had grown strange to her, or full of eager gossip that fell upon her ears, attuned to other themes, as idle rumour. The quiet process of alienation from her kind went forward, hardly perceived, and yet accepted like the days and seasons, as the fulfilment of a law that stood above human intermeddling.

Not many days of the Tower Maiden's new life had thus passed and been recorded, when she knew that her mother tongue alone remained to her for a common inheritance between her and her own people. The symbols of their common faith were symbols still, but



## The Tower Maiden

more—more to her than it was given her simple kinsfolk to understand. They had their loves—yes—but not such love as hers; they loved that which they could see and touch; their life and love went hand in hand. For her, she knew this love of hers had set her in spirit aloof and apart, even as inheritance had forced an isolation of the flesh upon her. With her now, as with them, emotion had come to breathe into the cold emblems of piety the warm breath of life. But to them, the touch of human fondness had come to be a thing of every day, bringing sensible and visible enrichment to their lives; to her, it was to remain but the memory of an hour—a new presence, a look, a touch, and now a memory.

Life in the tower had given scope and variety to her thoughts: till now there had been no sign that it had set her upon any spiritual quest of a broader faith than the one that had upheld her simple fathers. They had knelt—here, in this self-same spot, between the windows of the tower; or in the church and town, or out on bloody fields—had knelt to the wounded Christ, assured that they had done His work; the maid, as she knelt, now, in a doubting



## The Tower Maiden

age, prayed to the same Christ that He would keep and guard her in the path of purity, and was not shaken in the serenity of her belief. The Christ looked down on all alike in pity.

It was no emblem of doubt, but of unfaltering devotion, that day by day was stitched upon the canvas. That he did not return quickly, she did not blame him for. She did not hope—since to hope is to admit uncertainty—for his return: she knew that he would come. She knew, because in her dreams the wounded Christ would often come to tell her so. While she slept the Holy Mother came often too, bidding her be faithful. If not in this life, then beyond it, he would come, as he had given his sacred promise: as she had seen him in the tower, so he would come again, unchanged, unsoiled, because she prayed for this continually, to Jesus, and to the Holy Mother as intercessor. The love that would have gone out to him as human love had he come to claim it, went out in prayer for him always: he could not fail nor falter. He must come.

No day must pass on which she did not wait and watch for him at noon. When



## The Tower Maiden

storms swept the country, even when the old tower rocked visibly in the wind, or when the lightning seemed to fall like swords about the green cupola, still she would climb the stairs and would stand at midday, watching undismayed by the stairhead.



## VI

CLEMENT HALLIDAY went out into the world to live the life of his kinsfolk. He had taken of his own free choice the clearer path, and it was made easy for him. It was not given to his inexperience to know that the crisis, but had called him had been a thing not real, from a figment astutely planned to lure him into disastrous folly. The wise heads and lining that put him on his way gave him but the guidance in it; they set before him, a ghastly outset, only such obstacles as he could lift secret overcome; they kept their guidance a secret from him, and won him thus to a belief in his own unaided strength. The world—what he had seen it when he had paused a moment on its threshold, and had turned to hear, in his ear a whisper that became a silence when promises. was turned to it—did not belie its promise of ignorance. It was a goodlier place than in his ignorance of it he had dreamed.

He had paused at that parting of the ways when



## The Tower Maiden

to hearken within himself for remonstrance or reproof that might shake him in his resolve to follow the beaten sunlit road, to shun the dim and lonely one. The something fainter than shadow that had stood at his shoulder then, and had withheld him but for a moment from the counsel of those about him, had fled upon the declaration of his choice; nor had he felt its presence since. And the whisper that had given him a moment's pause, that also broke no more upon his inattention. Recollection of the room with seven windows and of the pledge he had given there had grown clear again, it is true; yet, when he turned his mind upon it, in rare moments of idleness, it brought him no remorse. And, for the vow, his man's wisdom had come to put that away with other childish things; with childhood's moments of murderous wrath and sinless lying—with all the foolish acts of infancy, that must be safeguarded against the full penalty of their consequences until maturity is attained.

Only the clear memory remained, immutable, silent as the stars. It is seldom that busy men lift their faces to the stars: when they do so the busiest will know that an



## The Tower Maiden

eternal, unchanging watch is set upon his soul. For Clement Halliday, this one mute memory came, in time, to play the part of watching constellations. While it was near and fresh, while the new life ran blithely in his blood, while he could look upon it as the headstone of his buried foolishness and could find condonation in its absence of reproof—then he could even welcome it as a companion in his leisure. In time its total silence irked him somewhat: he questioned it, and no answer came; he exclaimed, at length he raged—it gave him back the silence of an injured child. He turned from it and immersed himself, more strenuously than heretofore, in his affairs, and it vanished instantly. Seeking forgetfulness, he turned to contentious activity, and found it, as men find solace in a drug. Work filled his days, pleasure and rapid journeys absorbed the hours that his trained and comfortable fellow-citizens of the world gave to relaxation and repose. Yet still there remained the lonely watches of the night, and the awakenings, when a dull and over-driven body lay in the darkness or the spreading dawn as if pressed beneath a yoke; while the brain, perched high aloft, poignantly clear,



## The Tower Maiden

swept huge horizons and found them barren, and fixed its inexorable eye at last and always upon one silent watch-tower that stood alone in the empty vastness.

Those who had set him in what were to them the ways of wisdom came a second time to his rescue. They had given him a calling, and he had proved the soundness of their choice by prospering exceedingly. He had paid the due penalty of his success in a jaded body and a brain that never knew repose: both were yet sound, however; and both were to be made whole again in the one way that could bring him medicine for his sickness of unrest and the reward of his endeavour.

He made no pause now in choosing: there was no divided way before him, no shadowy counsellor at his shoulder. His labour had given him wealth, weariness, and great responsibilities: he could augment the wealth and ease the weariness, could grace and fortify the position he had made—so wisdom declared—by letting affection be guided by expediency in the selection of a wife. A man's fondness that asked no more than bodily and fresh perfections, had not far to seek for satisfaction; and, since the material aspect of the



## The Tower Maiden

alliance was approved in family council, by folk who were wont to be guided by a cold expediency alone, his world declared the bride to be doubly dowered.

Marriage gave him, in his early wedded life, the forgetfulness that he had craved. If he had won the boon at the cost of a heavier burden of preoccupation, if he had learned forgetfulness by filling up the waste hours of his home life with imperious activities, for long he did not know it. To himself, it seemed that he belonged at last to the world that he had chosen to reside in: he—who had learned to live so strenuously in the passing moment—told himself the past was dead; the fields of memory, now that he gave his mind no leisure to glance backward, were waste; the silent watch-tower was sunk at last in darkness.

A son was born to Clement Halliday. He heard the child's wail—a strange lone cry that sounded in every secret corner of the house; and when it fell upon his ears, and while he listened for its repetition, the ululation scared him to the soul. He heard it no more; and when he looked within himself for the reason of his sudden fear, he found only the hard-



## The Tower Maiden

brained, cynical indifference that was becoming now his constant mood.

The father saw his infant son but rarely, and then only when he was exhibited as an asset in the family treasury. The child's mother regarded the duties of motherhood as ended where the tradition of commoner folk indicates only their beginning; the sphere of her chosen activities lay outside the nursery walls; she desired to give the world no further pledge of womanhood than to bear a son. Rich, brilliant, tireless in social enterprise, insatiably greedy of advancement and of dazzling notoriety, she committed her child to the sole care of expensive hirelings that she might follow unfettered whither a restless ambition chose to lead, taking her husband along with her.

The son of Clement Halliday was carefully trained by preoccupied and busy parents, upon a system of expensive and elaborate neglect. Certain unfashionable, tender-hearted women of the family connection had prophesied above the child's cot, that the lack of the mother-warmth in infancy was fated to bring blight and coldness on his later years: no subsidy—so ran the verdict of this mother wisdom—could command, no hired service could supply,



## The Tower Maiden

that first, essential sustenance of the infant soul and body. In its early weeks the little life bade fair to make good this sinister forecast by going out again into the darkness whence it had been called. There was nothing of the lust of living in its one forsaken, penetrating cry; and the long silence that followed was more terrible than any living sound—even than the sound of living agony. For the child in its earliest days had the look of wisdom in infancy that, to those who can read it, is horror incarnate: the son of Clement Halliday looked out from priceless swaddlings, eldritch, wrinkled, unspeakably tired, knowing all that had been or was to be of human sorrow—knowing all, and mocking at it.

Yet before he had completed his first year the boy had already belied those mournful prophecies. He forgot or unlearned his uncanny wisdom, and the placid wonderment of infancy looked from his eyes instead. His withered body took on the curves of health; he grew rosy, and his long silence was broken up in laughter and the contented babblings of childhood. Heads were no longer shaken above his cot; the mother prophets were glad to own themselves mistaken.



## The Tower Maiden

And yet—and yet—not all the faces that stooped above him even now were free from the traces of a dim uneasiness for the boy's future. Where was the hidden root of their mistrust? None could say: to seek a shapen doubt, even in thought, was to feel that doubt was swept away before triumphant fact. The boy had started ill, Doubt whispered; and such ill beginning would surely cast a lifelong shadow. See him now, said Fact; the little body that could find strength to cast out such infirmities will bear the burden of its years to come as lightly as a web of gossamer. And the soul, that cried like a lost thing: what of it? The new-born soul that can fight its way unhelped through outer darkness to the light is indomitable, has put fear behind it. Ah, but whence came the current of new life, that brought health to the body and peace to the spirit? Not from the mother-warmth, whence all such strength should come. Fact was silent here; the doubters' eyes must find what answer they could in the child's laugh and rosy limbs. So the boy thrived, and baffled all searchings after the hidden secret of his thriving; and so doubt vanished before the doubters' plain questionings, and yet stalked



## The Tower Maiden

for ever in the shadow of their averted consciousness.

But the doubters were very few ; and since the misgivings were voiceless and without form even to the innermost thought, each held her doubt inviolably secret. Meantime, the boy made good the second and better promise of his infancy. He had been called by his father's name ; and the father, when he looked in the face of his son, gazed in the mirror of his own youth. Those who remembered Clement Halloway the elder, saw him now grow up again before their eyes. In hue and line—in every look and word and movement, moreover, that gave a clue to temperament—the man who had been, lived again in the bearer of his name.

It was a mute and totally unshapen fear that, when his child had given its one forsaken cry, had shaken its father to the soul. He was the busiest of men, and had great responsibilities to bear, and must be saved from needless tribulation : so it came that, when his child was in the first and awful stage of its existence, the father scarcely saw its face ; and even then the face was shown to him half hidden and with the eyes shaded. It was the first members of that guild of doubt and pity who safeguarded the



## The Tower Maiden

busy father from the risk of being brought to share in their incommunicable tremors. When the new, mysterious strength had come to the boy's aid and he had attained to lusty babyhood, the father, driven by his multifarious activities, was still a stranger to his son. Professional skill in medicine and nursing assumed the credit of having saved the little life by the establishment of a rigorous ceremonial of the nursery, based upon hygienic laws; and an elaborate formulary, although varied to meet the altered needs of the case, was still inflexibly maintained, long after its object had been won to health. A more determined fondness than was possessed by either parent for the child was needed to break through the restrictions that hedged his every moment from any but stern professional solicitude.

With Clement Halliday his son took rank as one item in the list of his possessions: his wife, his wealth, his hosts of envious admirers, had the same hold upon his regard—all were as tribute to his industry, and merely the earnest of his success. Circumstance, and a single quiet memory—now mute, if not outlived—had ordered that his days should be passed in a devouring haste. Ceaseless acti-



## The Tower Maiden

vity, at first a refuge, had become an imperious habit; he loathed the very thought of leisure like a sickness, and the quiet intimacies that may better be expressed in silence than in speech had long lost their meaning for him. In sleep, no dreams visited him now; and when sleep was done his mind, like an urchin scared of loneliness and the dark, had been schooled to cross at a run, and blindfold, that dim territory between oblivion and full activity; it never loitered in the borderland of slumber, where alone in life the sound body and the clean soul know utter rest, and where man's inmost, incorruptible self holds court and gives judgment upon his deeds. He saw his former self recreated in his growing son, and heard of the marvel of resemblance from a hundred tongues; it gratified and moved him no more, and no less, than the oft-told tale of wonder at his own achievements, or than the chorus of thanks that followed upon his barren hospitalities.

And yet, in the rare moments when he was left alone and face to face with his son, and saw his grosser self reflected in the living mirror of his own eyes made young again, Clement Halliday was afraid—of what, he



## The Tower Maiden

could not tell. When he looked thus, that lone cry would seem to echo in his brain, as though some wandering, lost thing within himself had uttered it. Once he caught the boy to him suddenly—to find he held a passive, wondering, unresponsive stranger in his arms. Once, when the cry resounded in him, he broke into reproaches: the clear eyes before him merely opened wider in a mild bewilderment, and the father saw upon the faithful lens the diminished reproduction of himself—a strange, gesticulating puppet. It was this rare touch of naked fear that drove the father to be one of those who were secretly aware that the boy was held aloof by some indomitable spirit from those about him.



## VII

THE son of Clement Halliday grew up from year to year in the very image of his father. In youth and boyhood the parent had been a dreamer; but his abstraction had been broken into, now by moods of black depression, and then by turns of brilliant exaltation, that again would leave him dull, intractable, rebellious: the son was a dreamer too; but in his cloud-land there were no storms; imagination was to him a sunny mountain, whence he returned always sweetened and refreshed as if by healing slumber. Often the father had bitten at the chains of circumstance, and the ways and customs of his kinsfolk; their traditions, and the little obligations of every day, had galled him like a sore: the son would seem to have learned without teaching the gospel of acceptance that makes for happiness; he took with unflinching kindliness all that the world gave him.



## The Tower Maiden

He shared fully, as it seemed, in the life of his contemporaries: and yet, in some subtle way, some inmost self in him—undeclared, elusive, ever-present to those of finer sense—stood aloof, and was a stranger. But this strangeness, upon the lightest touch of observation, dissolved, and became the normal; and he himself appeared to wonder most what it was that seekers after the unusual sought in him. Persistent inquiry into this haunting strangeness recoiled upon itself, seemed almost brutal.

The new strength that had come to him in infancy, and given him the human blood and warmth, remained with him, and grew with his growth. To the common eye he was a boy among boys, undistinguished save by a singular beauty and a natural fineness of behaviour. He was neither dull nor brilliant, but carelessly receptive; neither shy nor forward, seeking no company yet avoiding none; never boisterous, and yet not timid; the master of a serene, high courage, that was yet never shown save to confront aggression or defend the weak. He had the qualities of brain and body that pass unnoted among turbulent schoolboys, and was only saved from the



## The Tower Maiden

charge of mediocrity by the declaration of those to whom he was committed for his training that, if he would but cultivate them, the seeds of great promise were in him. It was a popular attempt to make plain reading of what, to the devoted few, was still the riddle of the boy's existence. Deep in the heart of these it was whispered that the tide of some mysterious impulse flowed in him and would bear him, in the coming time, to strange high destinies; he stood apart, and was alien among his own people. Yet even with this obstinate minority, instinct and observation were for ever at war: what instinct showed to the averted eye of consciousness, observation constantly refuted in the living fact: the pervading singularity was still that something fainter than echo that dies upon the attentive ear, the wandering speck of light in darkness that melts before a directed gaze.

He had the dreamer's eyes, that seem at once to look bemusedly within, yet forth and afar, expectantly. But there was nothing unearthly in the look—it told nothing of a spirit fretting and straining for release from the aching burden of the flesh; these eyes looked



## The Tower Maiden

from a radiantly healthy body upon a kindly world, hinting no half-known secrets of a ghostly universe beyond. They told of a spirit that was content to await its destiny in assured and sunny patience; and for the approach of destiny the eyes kept watch abroad continually—far abroad, and yet upon the solid earth. Although that far-looking gaze held always its welcome waiting for some high yet simple human comradeship—always expected, but never impatiently desired—yet at the lightest touch of human appeal the look would be withdrawn and give its whole heed to whomsoever had called it from the distance.

Even when the boy became a youth, and when observation, peering till now in the dark, would seem at last to have been rewarded for its constancy by a clue that the watcher's senses could take hold upon—even to follow this was to be led no nearer to the heart of the mystery. As the youth drew towards adolescence, this single overt trait that served as index to some hidden strangeness in him, grew sensibly more marked. That withdrawing of himself, that seeming to look afar for the approach of some ex-



## The Tower Maiden

pected friendly visitor out of the distance, remained always a tendency with him; in course of time the tendency became a habit; later, not only his idle gaze wandered, for ever searching the distances, but the expectant eyes would draw the body apart and upward so that, as it appeared, the sight should command a wider, clearer outlook. There was no faintest token of deliberation or intent in the movement any more than formerly there had been in the look; a lifted finger or a word would recall his steps; and now, as before, the lightest hint would reclaim his wandering attention and restore him instantly to be of the same mind and soul as the company he stood among. It was no moodiness that drove him from the rest, for those who followed him, wondering at his strange persistency, seeking the hidden cause, he would treat as welcome guests; there was no stealth in his withdrawal, for it was made without thought or heed of onlookers. Simply when the free earth lay around him, he would stray apart from his company, as a bird wheels aside from its mates and presently rejoins them, mindlessly, and to no visible end, and yet seeming to obey the dictate of some



## The Tower Maiden

inviolable law of purpose deeper than the thought of man may reach. Once apart, he tended upward, as the vapours tend, and let his sight swing east and west about the ring of the horizon.



## VIII

IN the high room with seven windows, the head that stooped every day at noon above the crimson stitching was streaked with grey. The cross was quite encircled now by a double interwoven ring, formed by the multitude of threads. Yet still, as at the beginning of this curious, unplanned device, each thread was laid in place upon the canvas to the memory of one more departed day and night, from noon to noon: and even as no thread was distinguishable from any one of its fellows, so now, as in the beginning, the watch was kept at noon, the prayer went up continually in faith as deep and undoubting as on the first day, that both at last would be rewarded. At last, upon the right appointed noon, he to whom prayers and faith were given always would stand upon the threshold there, as he had stood, as he had vowed upon the holy cross to stand again.

The circle was completed; the cross was



## The Tower Maiden

locked at last within the intricate pattern of recorded days. The untiring hand, throughout unguided by any shapen project in the tracing of the design, worked still as the blind devoted instrument of fate. The ring was closed ; the hand, aged but unfaltering, had come through the cycle of the vanished years, to work again where it had first begun upon its faithful task. From that point in the interwoven ring where the first mark had been set to the memory of bygone days, the daily stitches slowly massed themselves together and grew outward, formlessly at first, as if the naked branch were showing the promise of bud and blossom. But as the days drew on the line of stitches narrowed as it grew outward from its base, narrowed and shrank upon itself. And at last the Tower Maiden saw that the branch had in its blossoming time put forth a thorn.

When the stitches had drawn out and narrowed until at last, upon a certain noon, the addition of a single thread would give point and completion to the new symbol that had woven itself into the pattern, the Tower Maiden's hand—for the first time since this work had been begun—paused, after she had listened for a footfall on the tower stairs,



## The Tower Maiden

above the embroidery. She laid her uncompleted task aside, and went to that one of the seven windows whence, on days of an extraordinary clearness, the white Alp showed above the southern hills.

It was high summer now, and the Alp stood there, blue-veined and snowy white, filling the cleft between the sombre pine-woods, crystal clear to the eye, yet like a jewel set in the infinite heaven.

She raised her hand towards it. "To behold this brings good fortune to the faithful," she said, and added, in a whisper, as she let fall the hand—"It is what the old people say. I cannot tell."

She passed to the window on her right, and looked for a moment listlessly beneath her at the sunny wilderness of crinkled roofs. Slowly she made the round of all the windows, looking down and abroad from each in turn. When her eye fell upon the Master's house with its carved beams and pointed roof where the golden angel swung slowly this way and that, turning his face to follow the wanderings of the summer wind, her listlessness departed and gave way to a growing animation. When, from another window, her eye was carried outward at a



## The Tower Maiden

stride from one of the city gateways and along the great white road that cleft the green country like an arrow and was lost amid blue northern hills, a fervent restlessness took the place of animation in her. And the unrest was deepened when the roving eyes were caught and held for a moment by a tiny shaft, gleaming snowy white against a grove of black-winged trees, set within a walled enclosure that lay like a square of shadow upon the thriving greenery of the cornfields on every side of it. The Tower Maiden rested uneasy fingers upon a stone sash of the window, and looked beneath her. It was a market day, and in the square below she saw the rows of fruit-stalls, and, along the alleyways that ran between them, there eddied slowly in the quaking sunlight a crowd of women and blue-bloused labourers, drowsily intent upon their marketing. For a moment she kept her eyes upon the slow, familiar bustle of the market-place, as though it were a sight grown dear in absence; yet she looked on with head aslant, as if the reawakened, poignant interest that showed in her face had been stirred not so much by what met her eyes as by the sound of a voice that was speaking at her shoulder.



## The Tower Maiden

She faced round quickly, as though the voice had challenged her to a retort, stared an instant with eyes that seemed vacant and yet intensely observant, because they were focussed as if to look at an invisible something that was standing close to and a little above her in the great empty room. The look of challenge and of friendly animosity in the eyes gave way to one of surrender; the eyes fell, to watch her fingers, that were being slowly knit together and unclasped. The face grew young and aged again as the bright blood gathered in the cheeks and vanished; then the Tower Maiden—again as though the voice had called her there—went to lean in the embrasure of a window on her left.

She leaned backward against the stonework with her hands behind her, facing the empty wall; yet her lips moved, and ever and anon she smiled as if she were in happy communion with an invisible presence that stood over against her in the window nook. Twice she took her eyes from the naked stonework opposite to look across the town beneath; but she nodded as she looked and seemed to listen heedfully. A third time she looked across the town, and now her gaze was caught



## The Tower Maiden

and fastened upon one roof that stood shoulder high above the rest. When her eyes left it, they returned no more to the wall, but fell, to watch again the troubled clasping and unclasping of the hands.

One of the restless hands detached itself from its fellow, and was reached out suddenly to unlatch the window and throw it open to the wall.

The floor within and the window ledge outside were on one level, and beyond the ledge was death—for here the window bars were gone. As the Tower Maiden stood above the open gulf, tiny sounds from the streets that lay far beneath rose up through the sunny air and struck upon her ear. She heard the peaceful, steady hum of the market-place; she saw a lazy waggoner dozing in his seat, and heard the waggon jolting clumsily over the cobble-stones, behind the sleepy oxen, till all vanished down a by-street; women hurried homeward, laden with their marketing; a troop of children showed for an instant in the depth of a distant street and were gone—she heard their voices after they had disappeared. The Tower Maiden—wrested from her poignant memories into this sudden heed of the



## The Tower Maiden

who had laid his hand upon hers as it rested on the cross and had vowed that he would return to her upon the stroke of noon. She had lived her life for him, she had not strayed, not faltered : so neither had he. He would come again, in the likeness she had seen.

One splendid forenoon in summer, there was consternation in the business-place of Clement Halliday. For the first time in unnumbered days, those who had run to receive their multitudinous commands, had found their commander sitting slack and inattentive in his seat, and saw that their urgent questions fell upon unheeding ears. He, the pattern until now of shrewdness and daring, the living self of energy and forethought, the omniscient, the tireless, the prince of enterprise, was like a ship deserted and becalmed.

When the clamour of the city clocks resounded above the trampling in the streets at noon, he, who at that hour had been used to speak so that men in five continents should learn his orders and obey them, rose up like some idle stranger and went out alone.

Here and there in the street he was hailed by passers-by, who forgot their hurry for a



## The Tower Maiden

moment, turned and loitered, to wonder why this busiest of men was abroad at noon; why he passed slowly, and like a stranger from a distant place, busy with private thoughts; why he, who when abroad was commonly the most accessible of men, looked today straight before him and above the people's heads.

He turned from the open thoroughfare, and passed slowly down a flagged court, hemmed close between great buildings, that gave out upon a little open square. Cornerwise across the square ran a broad pavement, flanked by low railings that stood guard over three-cornered plots of scabrous grass and sooty shrubs. The pavement was thronged with a double stream of foot passengers; the idle man stood still when he came upon the open space, and the ant-like current of men flowed past and round him. He edged himself free of it, and was then alone upon a narrow path that ran from the broad footway to a deserted corner of the square, and rejoined it at the further end. At the angle of the path stood a grimy bench, and there he sat down.

Monstrous buildings towered in front of him, their windows looked upon him with a hundred eyes; close behind him sounded the



## The Tower Maiden

passage of the living stream; the voice of the city round about hummed in his ear its huge note of elemental turbulence. Yet he was in a great solitude; the windows near the ground were frosted over, hinting conspiracies within, fearful of spies; he was as dead earth to the busy passengers at his back; the living maelstrom of the city, as though it had spat him forth like wreckage, roared on unheeding.

Overhead, today, the sky was stainless blue, and in the unaccustomed brilliancy the stale earth and stunted greenery within the dirty railings seemed like prisoners, wrongfully condemned, and so long immured in the dark that they stood now dazed and blinking in the forgotten sunlight.

He withdrew his eyes from vacant contemplation of the many-windowed, drab-hued masonry before him and looked suddenly to his right. A small child—dirty, ragged, but lovely, a cherub of the slums; one, like the vegetation, unkindly robbed of his inheritance of light, and free air and sunny earth—was coming towards him. Sunshine and the blue above had found their right answer quickly here; the mite was deep in wonderland, brimful of happiness; he had that which is denied



## The Tower Maiden

he still kept his eyes upon the man's eyes and backed away; when he had thus moved until he had set several paces between himself and the stranger with his money, he turned and fled.

Clement Halliday saw the child swallowed at the corner of the square in the stream of busy men. He looked down at his outstretched hand, closed it on the coins, and set the clenched fist upon his knee. In his flight, the little boy had abandoned his treasure; the wooden horse lay overturned at Clement Halliday's feet. He stooped down and set it gently in position, and placed the rejected money in a silver pile beneath the horse, upon the little platform. Then he leaned back in the grimy seat, and his eyes wandered here and there about the sheer many-windowed walls before him.

The beat of hurrying footsteps near at hand, the distant tumult of the city, the drumming of a pigeon somewhere in the square, all the sounds that fell upon his ear served but to point the silence that had fallen suddenly upon him, a little while ago. In the full tide of his occupation he had become aware that an intolerable uproar was raging round him, that



## The Tower Maiden

he was sharing in it—had taken part in it for ages past; it had even been his life and had held a meaning. But now that he had become a listener to and no sharer in the turmoil, it had borne no more meaning to his ears than the shouting of a tempest. It was something ominous and terrible, something to flee from into silence. So he fled, and as he went the sound died away as the roar of a cataract dies upon the ear as one withdraws from it. He had been engulfed for ages in the torrent, and had found a meaning and a purpose in adding his own voice to its empty tumult; he had been tossed upon the brink, to wonder at the senselessness of all the sound and hurry; he had turned his back upon the mad confusion, and had wandered into silence.

At first, the silence was as barren of all significance as the sound had been. Grown suddenly a stranger to the sound, he came as a stranger to the silence. Reason and thought were drowned in it, as before the turbulence had overwhelmed them.

The crowded tablet of his mind was suddenly swept clean; it showed his groping senses a white page. The page was white, and yet the hand that had been stretched forth out of



## The Tower Maiden

the invisible to purify it would presently set a plain message there in place of the huddled, senseless writings it had swept away to oblivion. The host that he had marched with for so many strenuous years as captain and combatant had passed on and left him, its din and trampling had died out and he lay like a wounded man, helpless in desert wastes, a prey to the elements.

He had sat down to gaze above him in sheer vacancy, and then upon the vacancy followed the conviction that the empty solitude about him was loaded with a great uneasiness. The foreknowledge of a fateful message to be written on the clean page of his consciousness—of a world drowned in silence and awaiting the communication that was upon its way from the fathomless beyond—and the unhuman fear that came with it, found him unresisting as the air, dead to surprises, pervaded with the infinite credulity and submissiveness that we know in dreams. The child with its broken toy was a thing tremendous, significant, inexorable as a panther's eye, resistless as lightning; he made his overtures and his oblation as a savage offers bloody sacrifices to his fetich: when both were rejected he had no more



## The Tower Maiden

thought of incongruity than if he had been an actor in a nightmare. As he leaned back after the child had gone, he even felt something of the fantastic pride of the dreamer upon having rescued himself by deep cunning and mysterious readiness from some desperate emergency. If that was the messenger of fate who had approached him, at least the ambassador had been hospitably received; if he was to return, a token of friendliness awaited him.

He had, however, escaped but the first of a troop of dangers that was advancing upon him; the world still laboured beneath its horror of suspense; every window in the wall masked a secret as his eye toiled upward to the heights and quailed under the brilliancy of the summer sky beyond. A snowy cloud was sailing overhead, and as he watched it the high building toppled outward from its base majestically towards and above him, to fall upon him. He sank into a deeper pit of fear, and could not move an eyelid. The cloud passed, the house reeled backward and stood firm; the leaden body was a mounting vapour now, and rose to unimaginable heights—the eyes surveyed huge distances; a vast green territory of fields, and a far line of hills that stood upon the



## The Tower Maiden

threshold of the empyrean, and beyond a cleft in the hills—clear to the eye yet infinitely remote—a snowy pinnacle.

“To behold this brings good fortune, to the faithful; it is what the old people say—I cannot tell.” The words—clear at first, but dying to a whisper—came to him across immeasurable gulfs of silence, and were yet spoken at his ear. He was in a great high room with seven windows.

The mountainous obstructions that his years of toil had raised between himself and the memory of a single hour, had vanished into nothingness. Faithfully, relentlessly, in the room with seven windows, he lived his hour again.

Clement Halliday stared at the topmost windows far above him, and feared to think or move; to think was to know the remorse of the damned; to move was to feel the wrench of agony in his limbs, all battered by his fall from that great height. His inmost self, supremely cynical and aloof, looked on while his scattered senses, like frightened watchmen returning to their posts, mustered slowly and fearfully to resume their suspended functions; waited coldly to observe the panic



## The Tower Maiden

and feel the agony when they should reassert their supremacy and learn the havoc that had been wrought upon mind and body in their absence. He waited, as it seemed, long hours in vain, and then, like an angry despot who feared to be cheated of his lust of cruelty, endeavoured to strike out a foot so that he might feel the thrust of pain in the mangled limb, and hear himself groan, and thus prove to the sluggish senses that they had returned to irremediable disorder.

The foot was moved obediently and without pain, the movement was followed by a jingling and a light rasping fall; he sat up to see that he had kicked over the toy horse, and had scattered the silver coins upon the pavement. He restored both carefully to their position, then sat with hands on knees, and bent his brows in deep thought above them.

The accumulations of his busy years, laboriously piled to thrust a single memory out of sight, were sunk to a level wilderness, and athwart the waste, his memory looked upon him with a steady eye. Yet it looked silently, and within him there was no whisper of reproach, only—as the reward of all those toilsome years—an utter callousness. The years



## The Tower Maiden

lay waste ; the memory looked down upon him with its unchanging eye as it had looked at the beginning of the years.

A gust of anger shook him—the hot impatience of the busy and effective man, to whom each moment is a weapon and an opportunity. What madness had come upon him ? He stared above and about him, seeking the culprit who had dared to play this joke upon him : he saw only the towering walls with their hundred eyes, and his look returned again to the battered toy horse with its freight of money at his feet. Where was the terrible significance that had weighed upon the world a little while ago, that had made a frightened urchin seem in his eyes more dreadful than a thundercloud ? Where ? He rehearsed in memory with a tragical intentness that scene with the child, his own eagerness and his rejected advances ; the child's terror that would not be soothed. For a while he brooded in vain upon the mystery ; and suddenly, like a stab in his throat, mortal fear assailed him. A veil was lifted, and for an instant the naked horror that sits by the secret well-head of man's life was disclosed to him, and as suddenly hidden again.

He rose in haste to go and seek the child ;



## The Tower Maiden

then his eye fell upon the tide of busy men as it flowed across the square, and he laughed to himself at the folly of this errand. At his folly, but not at the earnestness that underlay it. The message, he knew it now, that he was brought here to receive had been delivered. It was meet that he should receive it at the hands of a child, of trusting innocence, such as he had wronged, such as had risen after this long forgetfulness and silence to remind him of his better purpose unfulfilled. To remind him only; not to rebuke him, of that he assured himself continually as he left the lonely corner of the square, and made his way homeward—to remind him of what there was left him yet to do in reparation: not to rebuke him for a broken pledge, a distant life withered by his inconstancy. At home was his unspoiled self—a stranger to him; in the healing of the strangeness, in the return to forgotten, simple kindness, in the safeguarding of that other self from the taint of his own corruption—here was his one stay against irremediable remorse. Tired to the heart, clogged in his movements like a spent swimmer, he set out to find his son.



## The Tower Maiden

The lad, sunk in his contented loneliness, was looking down from the embrasure of a window, toward and yet far beyond the street below him : Clement Halliday approached unheard, stood at the boy's shoulder for a moment, and spoke his name ; he turned, and the absent eyes looked deep into the eyes before them.

Since his agony of retrospection an hour ago, a face, seen once and long held forgotten, stood wondrously clear in the mind of Clement Halliday. The lad stood framed in the tall window behind him ; as the father looked into the untroubled face before him, the words he had come to say withered on his tongue. It was the face of his own dead self that he saw—his own flesh, and yet—and yet—a calm high spirit, never his, shone in it. Memory was obstinately, poignantly clear—feature by feature it was his face, another's—both. His tongue would utter no word.

He cried at length, again and again, upon his son's name. The face before him was stirred in a gentle wonder ; the eyes fell, to watch the hands being slowly clasped together and unclasped.

Clement Halliday went from his son's presence without a word.



## IX

CLEMENT HALLIDAY turned away from his son and went 'out alone, to hide his face in solitude and darkness: he had made himself the master of a household that would give him neither. He would have lain with his face to the wall, but the elaborate and ostentatious quiet of the sick-room that was imposed upon him, and the sage misreadings of his malady, flogged the irremediable unrest within him, and drove him for refuge to assume the part of convalescent. The joy that hailed his recovery was as hard to bear as the concern at his prostration; he put forth again upon the full current of his activities.

The fields of memory, after these industrious years, were waste, save for one silent watch-tower set in empty vastness; the offspring of his better purpose, irrecoverably lost to him, lived beneath his roof, sat at his table, looked him in the face with his own and another's eyes from the further



## The Tower Maiden

shore of innavigable waters. That lone cry, when it fell upon his inner ear, had a meaning for him now; it was the cry of a lost and wandering soul—his own. He had brought the world to his feet: adulation, envy, riches, were flung in his lap; it was the wealth of Judas; yet he lacked the desperate courage to rid himself of it, lest in seeking death he should not find oblivion.

The world claimed him as its citizen; he turned the same face to it that he had turned hitherto; yet he was not of it. Before that sleepless eye of memory, in the presence of remembrance living in his own image and with another's look, he was doomed to hunger perpetually for some deep fondness, some devoted tenderness, something to be won through sacrifice and not by strife, some peace that the world might have held for him if he had flung it from him and had followed whither his spirit would once have led him—to long incessantly and to know his longing hopeless; to see the world go roystering by, while he lay hidden from it, bound upon a rock.

When this isolation of his inmost self was thrust upon him, his son was but a lad; the



## The Tower Maiden

years passed slowly by as he saw the lad grow up towards manhood, and watched the impassable strait between them widen with the years. Like a soldier jaded in the wars and surfeited with pillage, he longed to hang up his sword, to be the friend of children and women, and of all defenceless creatures, to re-learn the wisdom of finding peace and forgetfulness in trifles and simplicity, to win the love that takes no count of riches. It was not for him. The broken toy that had seemed to him a visible destiny, malignant and inevitable; the child who had been smitten with fear of him as of something monstrous; the rejected silver strewn upon the pavement—these took shape in his mind as the tokens of his banishment from the gardens of childhood and serene old age. He, who was still the master of his circumstance, had become its slave as well; he had bidden by fierce contention for the foremost place, and as he had won excellence so he must hold it: his name headed a hundred lists of charity; but he could not win one human look from human eyes.

The remorse that had overtaken him touched only the soul, and left the body free of any corresponding canker; it was no wasting sick-



## The Tower Maiden

ness of the spirit, but a tireless, poignant self-contemplation, exquisitely clear, and passionless, as though the naked self of truth and sanity had been imprisoned in his consciousness. The body, schooled and hardened long since in strict obedience to the laws of health, remained obstinately sound, and was renewed perpetually by sleep to bear its tortures quite unhurt. Habit and his outward bearing had become to him part of the process of nature, and unchangeable; even to seek a refuge of forgetfulness in excess was denied him—as excess is denied to children and the brutes—by the lack of desire. Long since, he had invoked the aid of industry as a friend to safeguard him from the pangs of retrospection, and had filled the waste hours full with new, imperious obligations; the friend had become a taskmaster as magisterial as death; and his domestic liberty, once given up, was lost beyond redemption.

The Clement Halliday known to man remained and went his way unshaken and unstirred by the uprising within him of an unrelenting, unforgotten self. The visible man must remain in act and bearing the creature of those habits that he had imposed



## The Tower Maiden

upon himself when recollection grew importunate. The reawakened memory, the inner self, left the body and its behaviour still the bond-slave of a rooted custom, but cast from its secret place a cold, contemptuous light upon the busy slave. His son became to him now the living embodiment of this inward calm, this inaccessible accuser; became the interpreter of the fear that once had laid its finger on him at sight of the dwarfed reflection of himself in that steady eye—of himself as a selfless automaton. The mirror of his youth, as eloquent and yet as unresponsive as the ocean and the stars, was set before him constantly; and in the mirror's depths, elusive as a dream, there dwelt that second, subtle presence. The shadow that, when he had hung for a little while in indecision at the cross-roads of his life, had come to stand in silence at his shoulder, was face to face with him now. This son was the child of his body, and shaped in the father's likeness; but the spirit that looked from his eyes and animated his every movement, the soul within him that remained inviolably aloof, were the soul and the spirit of her whom Clement Halliday had wronged.



## The Tower Maiden

The years of retribution passed slowly. He had brought upon himself a quiet, keen remorse that neither ravaged nor consumed him, and was set far beyond the reach of his resentment. He was a man without a soul, the living sepulchre of his better self. His name was a bye-word for munificence and a splendid philanthropy : the lighted lamp of memory burned within him and his bygone self kept its watch upon him from without, impassively. The child who had fled in terror from his offered friendliness was still to be the unaltered symbol of his lifelong interdiction from sharing in the little kindnesses that sweeten simple lives. As he had gained wealth so he must use it, ostentatiously and before the public eye. Upon rare occasions when he found himself, at night, alone and on foot, he would steal down dim unlighted byways and seek to comfort crying urchins, or to show pity for the outcasts in the street : his touch and voice could give no comfort and no pity ; when he came empty-handed to offer sympathy he brought mistrust and fear ; when he offered money to the forsaken ones, they would snatch it and flee, as though they had robbed a thief.



## X

IN the high room with seven windows a gray-haired woman—the last of all the race of Heaven-folk—still kept her faithful watch. To the aged townsfolk, whose memory ran backward to the days of her predecessor in the tower, she was linked with the departed glories of the town; to the elderly, who remembered her a comely maid and had watched her, a beloved familiar stranger, come and go amongst them, ageing with their years, she stood as the embodiment of their pride of race and citizenship; to the young, who all had run to her in joy and trouble, the town without its Tower Maiden—by night when she was amongst them, or by day when she watched above—was a thing incredible. Like the place where she kept her watch by day, she was set beyond the reach of all contention that went forward in the small community beneath and about her; like the angel on the Master's roof, the old houses of the market-



## The Tower Maiden

place, the church and its monuments—the keeper of the tower was included in the impartial veneration of townsfolk for their memorials of a common ancestry of sober burgesses and stout-hearted fighting men.

Alike with citizens and country folk and with strangers from far off, the title that had been given her when as a young girl she succeeded to the office of her forefathers still clung to her, although her hair was gray; she was never spoken of but as the Tower Maiden. And still, now as when she was in the first freshness of her beauty, her face and voice and the seven-windowed room would linger in the memory of many a one of those travellers who climbed the tower stairs and would shine out upon their hours of darkness like a lamp.

The secret of this strange ascendancy defied all search and questioning, now as at the beginning: the symbol of it, the record of a trust and faith as deep as life, was still taken from its hiding-place at noon, and hidden away, when noon had sounded, and when it had received the record of another day of unrewarded watching. The watch was unrewarded: but the hand that set the daily



## The Tower Maiden

record in its place held to its task unflinchingly, and was the right servant of a spirit that had never known the lightest shadow of mistrust. The prayer that had gone up day by day, now for close upon thirty years, was still as fresh and living as upon the first day of its utterance; a passionate belief, an inspired assurance, was rooted in the very centre of her being that such devotion given to another must bring him at last to fulfil that which he had spoken, that which to leave undone must be his soul's destruction. Once as a lover, then as wife, and now as mother, she gave her life in prayer, not for herself, but for him; that he should be kept true to his trust; that he might return, not because she longed to see him and to hear his voice, but because he had vowed upon the cross he would return: and to break this vow was death for him. The years had left their mark upon her body, and, all unknown to her, had changed in their inevitable process the colour of her thought and her petition too. She prayed as a mother now: but now as always, whether she knelt to the wounded Christ, or whether memory beckoned her to momentary forgetfulness of secular occupations, the object of her tireless



## The Tower Maiden

intercession stood before her in the image of unalterable youth. So he had stood when he had given her his sacred pledge unasked, unsought; so he would stand when he redeemed it, upon the stroke of noon.

Since that day when she had read in the unconsidered pattern of her embroidery its message of sorrow, and had thereafter lived in memory, more real than reality itself, through her one happy hour, the years had passed unbroken by the revisitation of any poignant recollection. Day by day and stitch by stitch the record of her unfailing trust had woven its intricate device upon the canvas; the untiring hand a second time had all but made the circuit of the double ring that enclosed the cross: each curve of the interlacing strands had sprouted like the first; a few more days and the chaplet of thorns would stand completed.

The last earthly longing of the woman for her mate had died out upon the fading of the vision that came to her with the foreknowledge of that which her hand was fated to inscroll upon the canvas. She accepted her crown of sorrow and of renunciation of the flesh as a benefit, a welcome call upon her fortitude, a







## The Tower Maiden

come of that inviolable peace within her, that the end of her long vigil was near at hand : with the completed crown the reward of her unshaken trust would come at last ; the soul that she had given her strength to keep from faltering would soon return in the likeness that she knew.

Here and there about the crooked streets of the old German town a stranger hurried and lagged alternately, like one who had come forth upon some vital business, and was yet objectless. Now he would stand in the roadway and look eagerly yet vacantly above him at the projecting gables, or beyond them at the summer sky, when he would approach a townsman as he passed in the same direction, then stand, frowning and puzzled, as if he had been struck of what he saw, and slipped his hand into his pocket. Then he would step forward, looking at nothing, and when a street turned he would follow through the street, as if he had been spurred by some unseen force, to show the name of the street, that was his name, and to find the house, and then he would wander about the heart of the town, and draw



## The Tower Maiden

one of the host of travellers that passed at all seasons through the place, he was yet no ordinary tourist: he was empty-handed, and had none of the centred and systematic energy of the sightseer with his map and guide-book; he gave no closer heed to the historic landmarks of the town as they came beneath his eye than he bestowed upon the pavement at his feet, the sky above him, or the passers-by who paused now and then to gaze wonderingly at him: on all alike he bent the same look, of one who has forgotten the purpose of his errand and is yet upon the brink of its discovery.

Still earnest and irresolute at once, he rounded at length and suddenly into the market-place. There he stood still for a moment, as though he had stumbled on a clue that would guide him to what he sought, and might yet be followed leisurely, since there was still abundant time upon his hands. It was a market day; the cobbled square was a lake of sunshine, walled on three sides by ancient houses that looked down on streets of white awnings, propped above the loaded fruit-stalls, and on the full, slow-moving stream of purchasers that crept along the alley-ways



## The Tower Maiden

between the stalls. The snowy awnings, the loaded stalls and the gossiping and simmering crowd of buyers stood out in sharp relief against the sombre bulk of the church that stretched across the further side of the square. In the shimmering sun-haze, the helmeted shaft of the church tower that dominated all beneath it, trembled along its outlines like a ribbon.

The stranger, with his eyes upon the commanding tower, set out towards it, as though his movements now were made at the call of purpose. His way led him at once among the crowded alley-ways; and there—as if his new intention had not clearly shaped itself as yet—he fell at once to the slumbrous pace of those about him and drifted leisurely with the slow-moving currents. His dress and features marked him for an alien; he looked about him with a lively curiosity; yet his look was less that of the foreigner greedy for strange sights and new impressions, than of one native-born, revisiting, after long absence, familiar scenes. He watched the faces round him and listened to the quiet talk as though in momentary expectation of friendly greetings—as if his foreign look and garb were put on for



## The Tower Maiden

the occasion only, in masquerade, to puzzle homely wits and to enhance and defer the joy of recognition. Yet, as it seemed, the masquerader himself was puzzled, and was playing a part that had been thrust upon him, and acting in a drama of which he, no more than his audience, knew the issue. One moment he seemed to watch for the greetings of old friends and to look above the crowd at the tower and church and ancient houses that sentinelled the square as at familiar and yet forgotten things; the next he would laugh as if at his own absurdities; a moment later and he would fall again under the charm of his agreeable, expectant wonderings.

He was staring at the single blunt hand of the church clock when a voice behind him said, "The gentleman has need of fruit on such a day of warmth, is it not true?"

The stranger turned, as if the expected greeting had fallen at last upon his ears, and was benignly smiled upon by a dame who sat behind a wealth of fruit. She was brown-faced and silver-haired; two brown hands were folded in her lap; a peaceful, hale contentment shone in the old face.

"Fruit? Yes. The little mother is right.



## The Tower Maiden

But when all is so fine, how then shall one choose?"

"But only see! It is, however, remarkable; this is no Mist'r, this one who has the mother speech so well. Yet he appears so English in the outlook!"

"But I am—I am truly English, mother," the stranger said, gratified, yet wondering, and as if touched with fear.

"Na, na, the gentleman is pleased to joke," the sturdy dame insisted, "the tongue is not an English tongue that speaks so; and yet"—she refolded her hands and looked him critically up and down—"but yes, the face is English, also the clothing. Yet," she ended emphatically, "the gentleman is no stranger to our land. That one can well see."

He laughed out in open delight, and grew solemn. "I have first come to your land, it is not yet a week since, and"—he cast a sudden look about him at the townsfolk and the buildings—"I—no, it cannot be that I have seen this place before."

They looked seriously at one another, as if they had drawn together by different roads, and were face to face with a mystery.

The dame nodded and slowly shook her



## The Tower Maiden

head. "It is, however, remarkable. So, the dear God means not that one should understand all things. And the fruit, Mist'r?"

"Ah, the fruit. Yes." The stranger looked profoundly here and there among the glowing heaps. "The fruit," he repeated absently—"how shall one know——?"

Something behind him was pulling lustily at his coat. He turned to find that it was a little boy like a sun-burned cherub who was thus solemnly busy for some inscrutable reasons of his own in calling the stranger's attention to himself. The Englishman stooped down and lifted up the intruder in his arms. The boy was not at all afraid; he tucked in a fat chin, pushed himself backward a little, and from beneath his eyebrows he bent upon the stranger a deep inquiring stare. When the Englishman had borne this childish inquisition steadfastly, the small boy, supremely confident, settled himself snugly in the protecting arms.

The Englishman turned again to the stall and held the child forward and above the fruit.

"See, little mother," he said, "here is one wise enough to say. Dost thou like fruit, Wise Man?"

"Yes." The little boy ducked forward to



## The Tower Maiden

say the word, then turned his head aside and towards the Englishman's when he had uttered it, and in a spasm of ecstatic shyness thrust a chubby fist against his mouth.

"So. Hark to the wise words, mother. But here are many kinds. Let the Wise Man say—which is the best?"

"Cherries." The fist was plucked away and returned immediately.

"It is spoken. Cherries, mother, if it please you. One bag for the Wise Man; one for the—Ho, Wise One, say, who then am I?"

The little boy removed the fist, put his lips to the Englishman's ear and whispered a word.

The market-woman paused at her weighing of the cherries to watch the stranger and the child gaze solemnly at one another as if they shared some wondrous secret.

"What is it, then, that the Wise Man has said?" she asked.

"He is but a child," the stranger said, and coloured deeply.

"I have said—" piped the boy in his childish treble; but the stranger shook and pressed him fondly, cutting him short.

"Hush, mannikin, it is for thee and me; the little mother, perhaps——"



## The Tower Maiden

"He is but a child," said the market-woman, nodding slyly as she continued to weigh out the cherries.

The stranger, as he gently set down the child, saw that the passers-by had gathered together and were watching him with deep attention, while a handsome young peasant woman who stood before them was talking eagerly. Her face was lighted up with pride and wonder; she turned her head this way and that as she addressed those about her, and pointed to the stranger and the little boy.

"Na, look you, I turn thus"—she looked behind her—"and the little one there is gone—is vanished! I say at the first, in my heart, a robber has taken him; then—no, here are no robbers: it is the good God or the holy angels who have done this; assuredly, I say within me, he has not run from me himself. He—my little one? No! The mouse, the wild-bird, is not so timid. The animals he fears not, no, not even great dogs—but men! Then I look—and behold! He has run to a stranger, who lifts him in his arms, and they speak together, and yet the little one is not afraid—and laughs!"

A massive, quiet peasant had shouldered his



## The Tower Maiden

way through the crowd that stood pressed together behind the woman. She looked up at him as he laid a huge hand upon her shoulder.

"See, Ludwig, look at thy child, the timid one. Is it not a marvel?"

The large man said nothing; he thrust the woman gently aside and came forward, so that he, the stranger, and the little boy, stood alone, encircled by the crowd. The Englishman still rested his hands upon the shoulders of the child, who was contentedly busy with his cherries; when he saw his father, he held up his prize triumphantly, then hugged it to him again.

When her husband passed by her and made no answer, the woman fell silent and moved aside so that she could see his face as he confronted the stranger: as she watched, she clapped a hand to her mouth, as though words that she dared not utter had come to her lips. A muttering ran through the crowd; those who stood nearest to the centre spoke in undertones to those behind them of what was passing.

Amazement sat in the full-opened eyes of the peasant; and the troubled forehead told



## The Tower Maiden

that the slow wits were groping in the darkness of his memory—eagerly, and yet half afraid of what they might discover there as the root of his perplexity. The eyes, blinking unsteadily, moved back and forth from the face of the stranger to the little boy hugging his bag of cherries; the right hand was laid, palm outward, to the forehead, then to the mouth. Thrice he drew a quick breath, as if to speak, then shook his head as though speech were a folly. Suddenly the hand was withdrawn and pointed towards the child, and a question was flung at the stranger.

“The cherries. It was you, then, who gave them?”

The stranger spread out his hands, shrugged and smiled. “I gave them. Yes. The little one came to me.” He framed the chubby face in his hands and moved it backward so that by stooping he could look into it. “Is it not so, Wise Man?” The round face nodded upward between the hands. “I meant no ill,” the stranger added.

The peasant, with a sweeping gesticulation of his head and hand, seemed to cast aside the very thought of resentment, then laid the hand as before to his mouth, and fell again, as it



## The Tower Maiden

seemed, to searching in the dark places of his memory. Each time he spoke the words came suddenly from him, and he removed the great hand and pointed with it towards the stranger's breast as he uttered them.

"In the church there is comfort," he said : and at that the stranger's eyes sought the church tower and returned to the face of the peasant. And again, "Ye are poor," the man said ; and then, "Give me thy hand, little one." As he said this, the huge hand was tightly closed, as though some invisible thing had been placed in it. Then it was laid again palm outward against the lips. And at last, "Good-bye, thou brave little one," the peasant said.

He had spoken his curious words and had thrust out the great hand as though in expectation that some one of the phrases might waken a responsive echo in the stranger's memory ; and the stranger listened to the words and pondered on them with so deep an intentness that the people who stood round watched him as if in a moment he must give them all a clear interpretation of the peasant's mysterious perplexity.

As he said his last word and saw the stranger



## The Tower Maiden

unenlightened, and yet as if pursuing some shadow in his mind that still receded, the peasant threw out his great hands and heavily swung his head from side to side. The townsfolk saw in the act an acknowledgment that the slow mind had been confronted with something so deep and strange that, failing the comprehension and the sympathy of him who had evoked the wonder, it were sacrilegious to investigate it further. He stood back a pace, so that he pressed against those behind him, and made the sign of the cross; those who stood nearest the stranger edged backward also, so that he was left with a clear space before him.

“Na, I have said this was no stranger who has come; the child, who is so timid, did he not know also? And the little one, moreover, has whispered in the ear words that he knew. This is no stranger.” It was the market-woman who spoke, and her voice sounded clearly in the silence that had fallen.

The little boy still stood where he had been set down by the stranger's knee, and ate his cherries in happy and unconscious deliberation. When the stranger stooped to frame the chubby face in his hands and look down into



## The Tower Maiden

it again, and then to set the child gently upon his way to the peasant, he refused to go, as if he feared to lose a playfellow. The stranger stooped and kissed him.

"Go to thy father, Wise Man: I return presently;" and the urchin, reassured, toddled to the peasant, and clutched a great finger held out to him.

The crowd fell silently apart to make way for the son of Clement Halliday as he went from amongst them; he walked now like one sure of his intentions, and yet his eyes, as he gazed towards the summit of the helmeted tower, were the eyes of one who has strayed abroad while sleeping. The blunt hour-hand of the tower clock had crept close upon the figure of noon.

. . . . .

The Tower Maiden stood to watch by the stairhead, as silent as a shadow. In her left hand she held the string that was knotted to the latch below; her right hand rested upon the embroidery that was hung on the carved baluster. An empty needle was thrust in the canvas; the intricate pattern that framed the cross was finished. The woman was listening to the sound of quiet footsteps that grew clearer and clearer in the hollow tower until





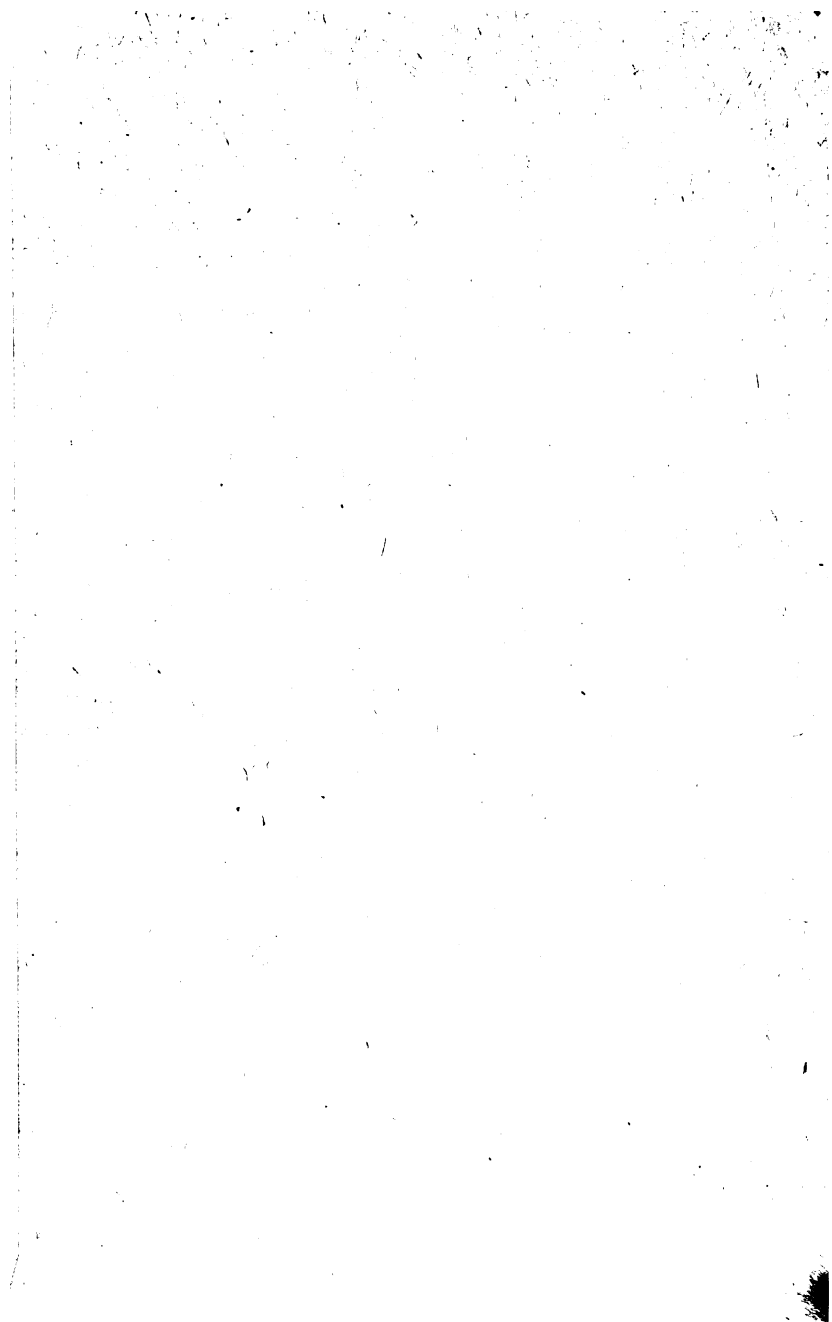




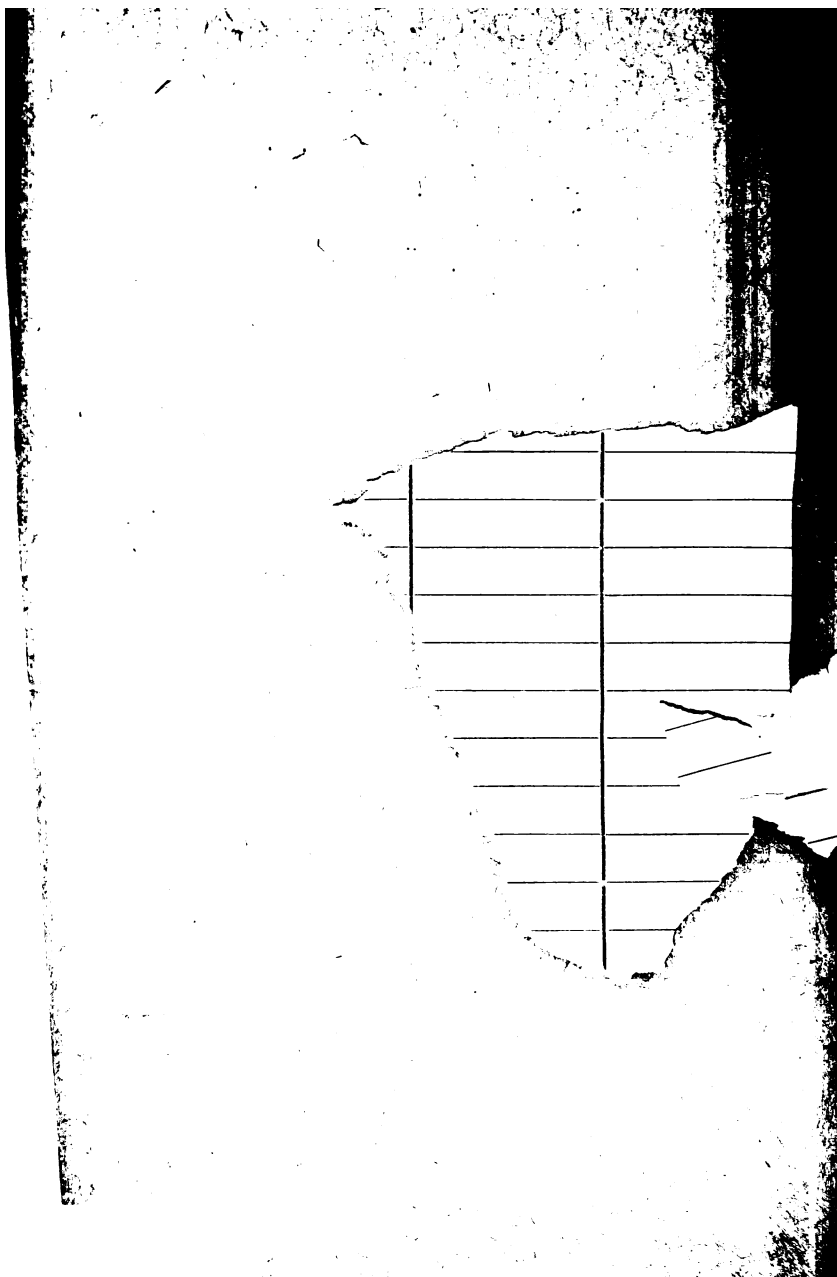














1925



